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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



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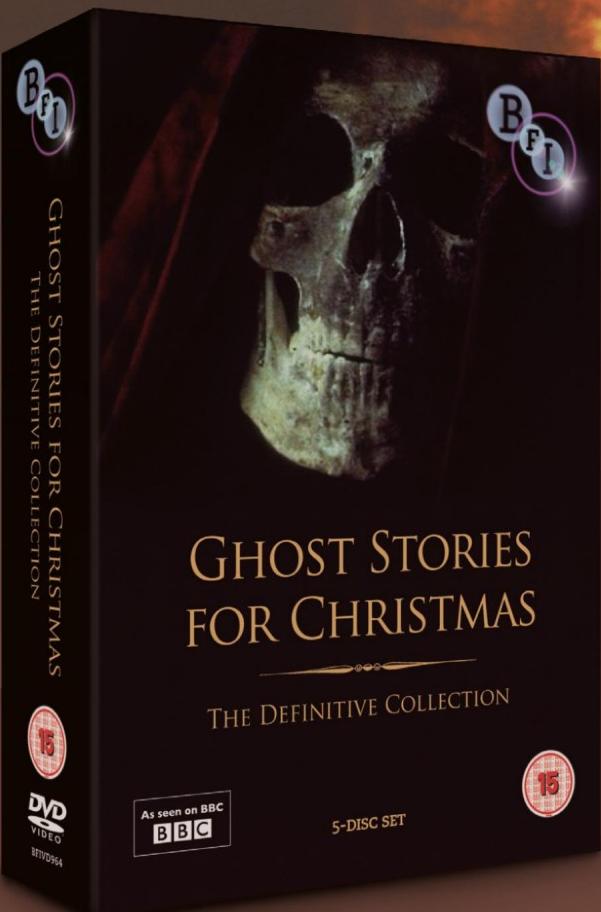
THE WILD ONE: JOAQUIN PHOENIX IN

THE MASTER

Michael Haneke on 'Amour' and his career to date **Cristi Puiu** on playing a murderer in 'Aurora'
Miriam Hopkins the upstaging comedienne par excellence **Mark Cousins** on the meaning of close-ups
Thomas Vinterberg on 'The Hunt' and moral panics

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The promotional still above represents one of cinema's greatest self-reflexive moments. It shows, of course, the climactic scene of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd* (1950) when Gloria Swanson (above), playing one-time silent-era movie star Norma Desmond, is about to be taken away by the police. Seeing the press crowd that's gathered, she flips delusionally back to her former glory days and says, "All right, Mr DeMille. I'm ready for my close-up." We too are ready for our close-ups this month. We celebrate a new DVD and Blu-ray restoration of

that ultimate close-up film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (p.44). Mark Cousins looks at significant use of the face in cinema (p.47). We have an in-depth career-survey interview with Michael Haneke (p.54). We cover *The Master* (p.28) – a portrait of the war-damaged and those who would exploit them – and talk to its director Paul Thomas Anderson (p.32). And speaking of movie stars of the golden age, we also profile tough cookie Miriam Hopkins (p.36). So, in the spirit of Erich von Stroheim (above left, as Norma's director turned chauffeur), it's time to say: "Action!" **Nick James**



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[JIGOKUMON]

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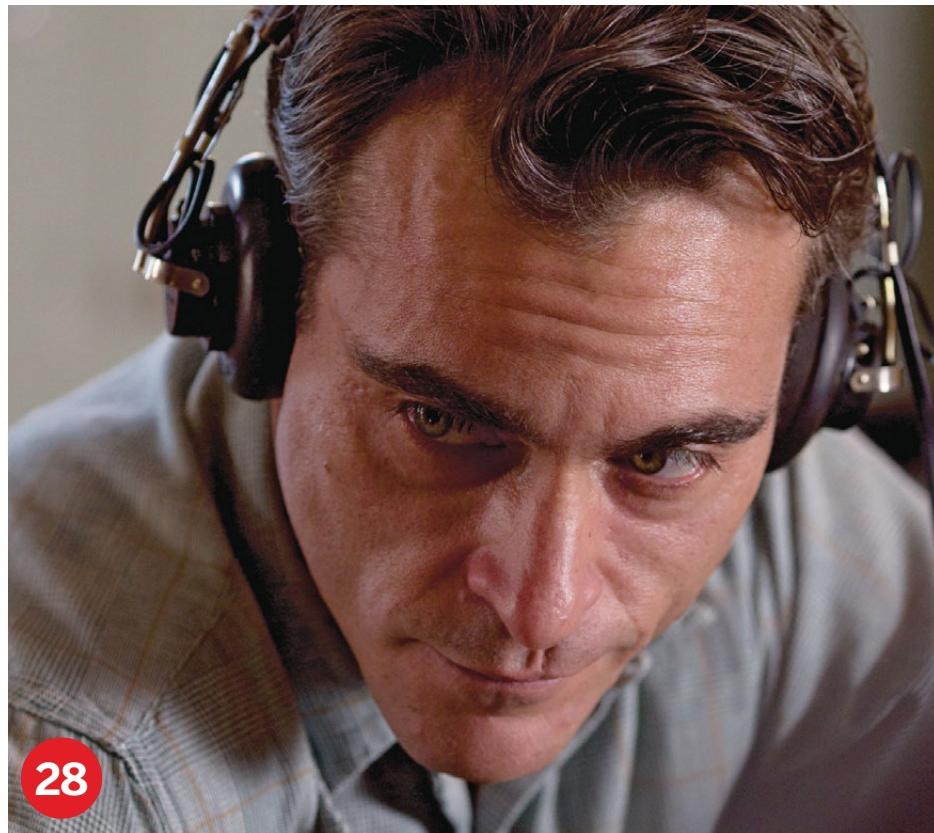
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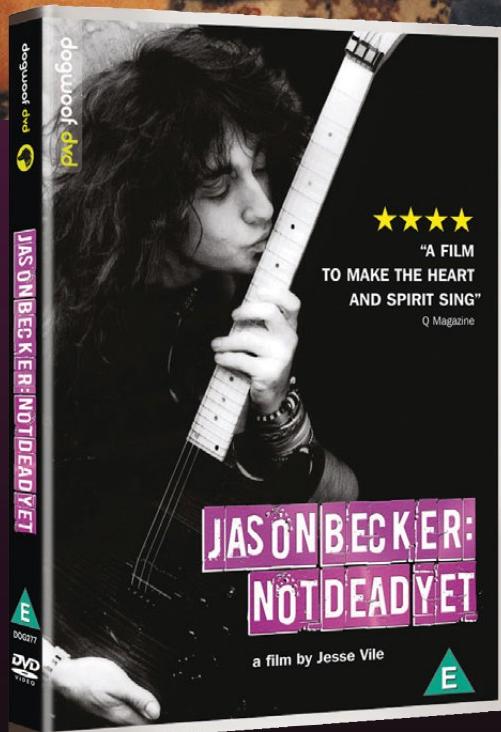
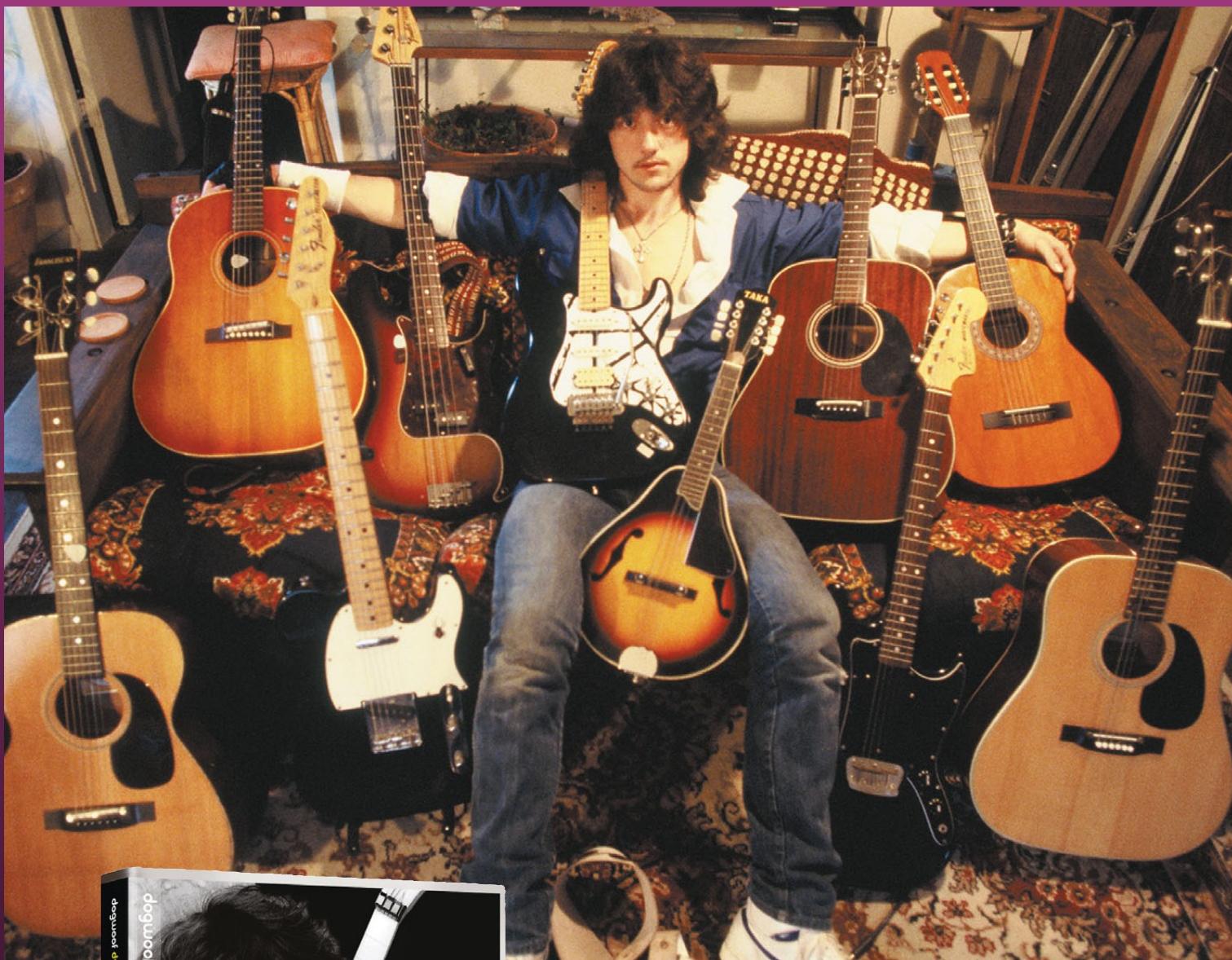
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COVER

Joaquin Phoenix in 'The Master'. Retouched by DawkinsColour

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on sale 4 December

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No matter what their taste... there's a film to suit everyone on your Christmas list!



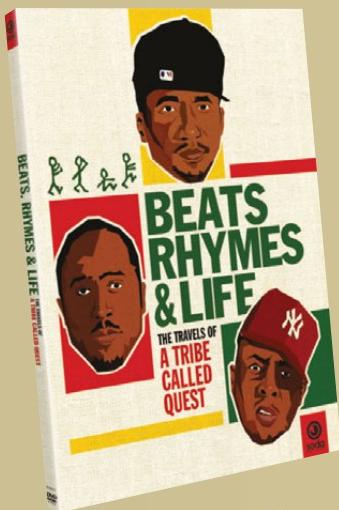
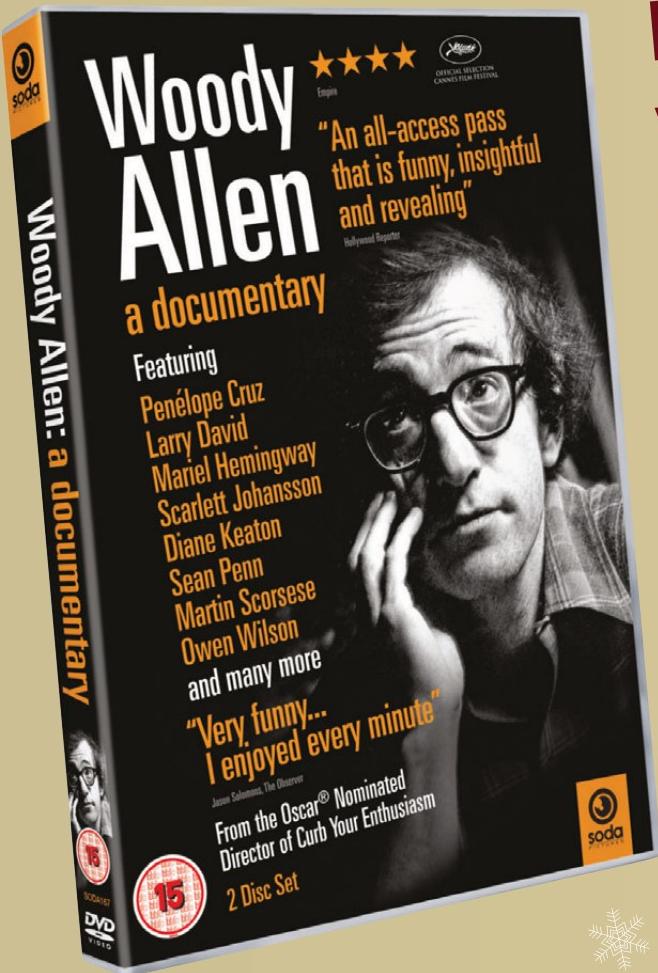
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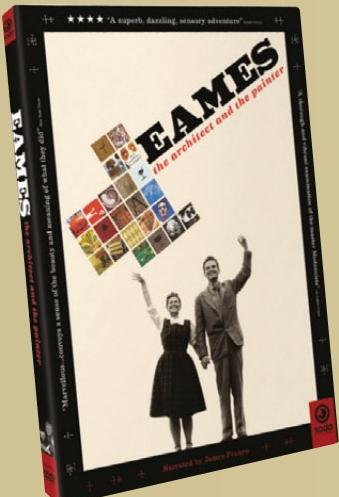
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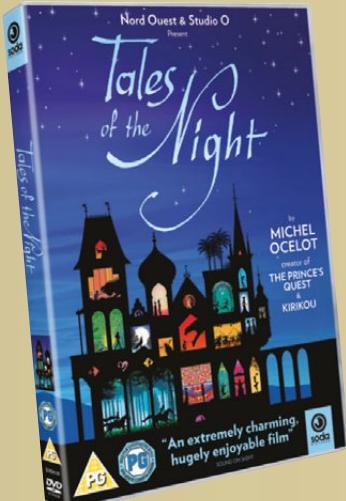
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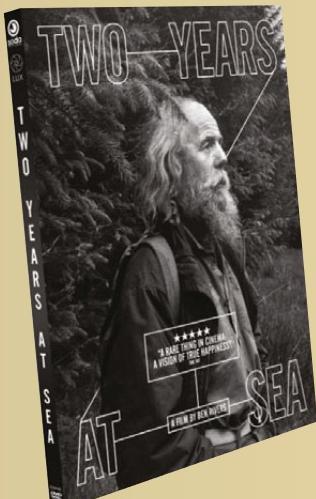
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Editorial Nick James



THE PROPS OF FICTION

Those of us lucky enough to see many films at festivals sometimes benefit from enlightening juxtapositions. During the opening week of the recent BFI London Film Festival, I was editing the transcript of an interview with the Romanian director Cristi Puiu that I'd conducted at the same festival two years earlier – about his film *Aurora* (see page 40). The first thing to say about *Aurora* is that it is at the extreme end of what we might call quotidian cinema: films that allow the details of everyday life to provide the texture of suspense and drama, without much obvious recourse to the traditional storytelling virtues of action and motivation.

With *Aurora* thus on my mind, I saw two more terrific films at this year's LFF that also attempt to portray a passage of time in a real-life situation: Ira Sachs's *Keep the Lights On* and Michael Winterbottom's *Everyday*. Together these three films would make a fascinating – if exhausting – triple bill, for they offer a rich variety of approaches to the same problem of depicting the everyday over a specific time period.

Aurora charts 36 hours in the life of a man (played by Puiu himself). According to my 2010 Cannes report, he's "a seemingly gentle, dreamily distracted bear of a man only half preoccupied with a life that shows traces of some emotional cataclysm. When he takes delivery of two new firing pins for his hunting rifle, you remain unsure of his intentions – and of the full nature of his slightly off-kilter relations with the people he meets." Though there are elements of suspense and action in *Aurora*, what fascinates above all is the detail of his estrangement.

Keep the Lights On is more about gradual change. It describes the evolution of a ten-year relationship involving Erik (Thure Lindhardt), a diffident Danish documentary-maker living in New York, and the seemingly strait-laced Paul (Zachary Booth), who works in publishing. They meet through a casual-sex hook-up; although Paul presents himself at first as having a girlfriend, he eventually moves in with Erik. Any reluctance I might have about ruining the plot of this film is assuaged by the fact that plot is beside the point. What matters is the emotion on the faces of the actors; although Sachs's film is happy to enjoy their prettiness, his camera is forensic in its keenness to show the vagaries of desire and

It's often claimed that storytelling has been abandoned by Hollywood, but a fascination with authenticity has led specialist filmmakers to an equal mistrust of the dramatic fictional yarn



romance, the tensions between enthralment and self-interest, and the waxing and waning of emotional connection play out on the surface of the human face and in that mysterious realm 'behind the eyes'.

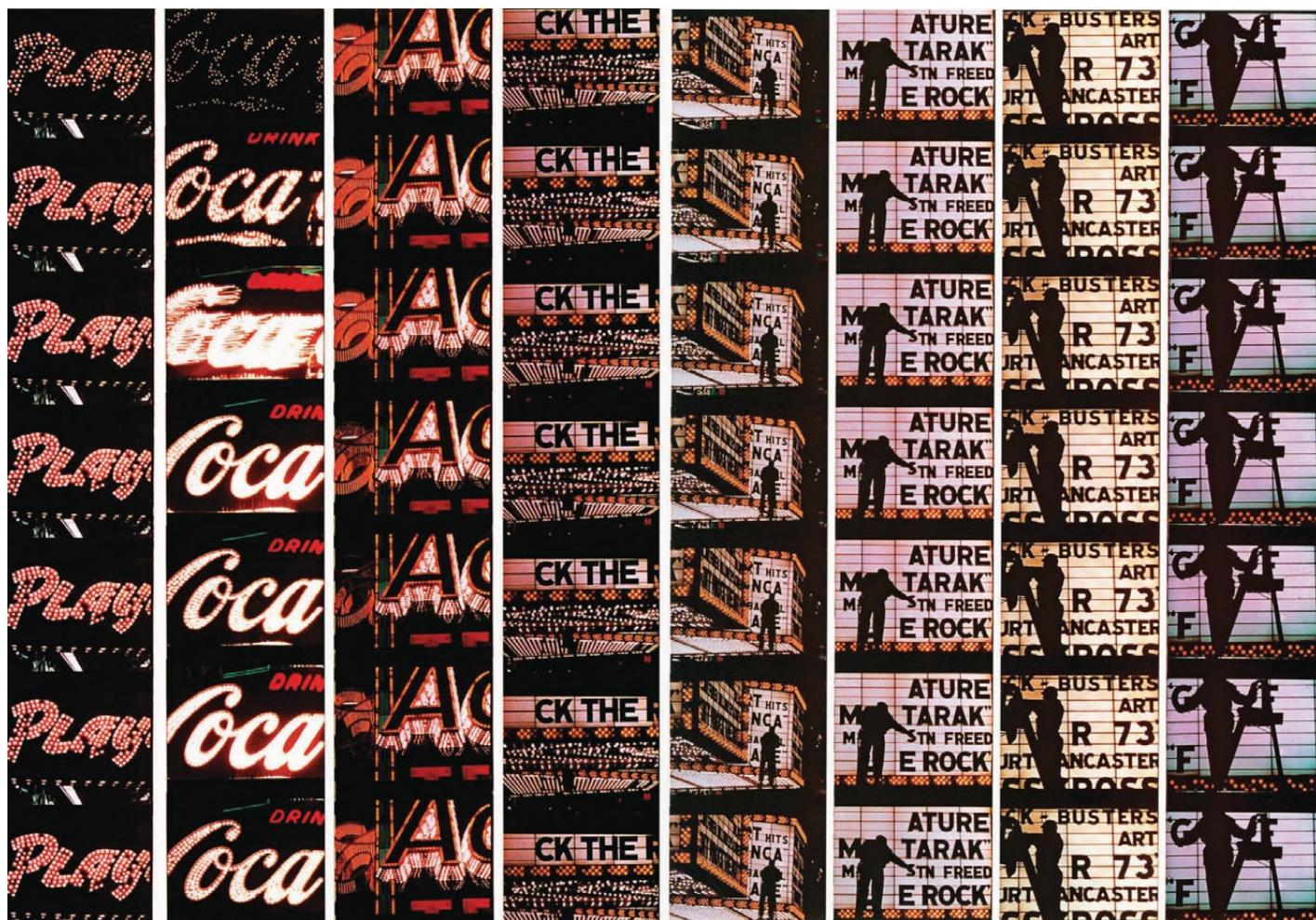
Everyday is more of a deliberate experiment in that it chronicles five years in the life of a family and it took five years to make, shooting for a couple of weeks every year. The film's main focus is on a mother (Shirley Henderson) who's raising four children while their father (John Simm) is in prison. Even more so than the two previous examples, *Everyday* is made up of small, seemingly ordinary moments: the journeys to the prisons, the kinds of treats they can afford to give the kids, the snatches of shared pleasure. The unique aspect is that the excellent actors visibly age their five years' worth on film – especially noticeably, of course, in the case of the children.

In all these films, it's the familiarity of what the characters are going through that encourages us to invest emotion in their respective fates. In that sense these films share some of the vicarious pleasures of reality television, even though the desperation to sensationalise in a show like *Big Brother* is the very opposite of what these films set out to achieve. It's often claimed that the traditional virtues of storytelling have been abandoned by corporate Hollywood studio product in thrall to the superior success of shoot-'em-up videogames, but we can see here – across this wide range of festival-friendly films – that a fascination with authenticity has led specialist filmmakers to an equal mistrust of the dramatic fictional yarn.

And yet if you compare these three (the fatalistic Romanian tragedy, the elegant New York gay-relationship portrait and the realist near-docudrama set at prisons around England) the strange thing is that the film that requires the most endurance to watch, and which dwells most on authenticity – *Aurora* – may in the end be the one that relies most on the props of fiction. **S**

IN THE FRAME

MISTER FREEDOM



Bright lights, big city: film strips from William Klein's first short, 'Broadway by Light'

Tate Modern's exhibition of William Klein's photographs also allows us to sample his extraordinary films

By Isabel Stevens

Blending in has never been William Klein's style. In the early 1950s, when the painter-turned-shutterbug-rebel started losing

himself in New York's streets, he couldn't have been further from the mould of the invisible photographer, hiding or disguising his camera, composing and calculating his exposure from a safe distance. Klein made sure the anonymous faces in the crowd saw a tall man with a wide-angle lens coming for them, grabbing everything from the scene – a haze of passersby, logos, graffiti – in, as Klein put it, "a gluttonous rage".

The violent, blurred close-ups, grainy

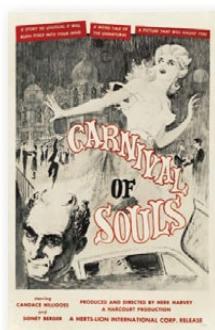
views of nowhere street corners and casual, off-kilter horizons didn't impress publishers, who regarded Klein's New York as a slum. Only Chris Marker, then working at the Parisian publishing house Editions du Seuil, recognised the wild beauty of Klein's photo book (its half-Beat, half-tabloid subtitle says it all: 'Trance Witness Revels') and announced he would quit unless Seuil published it.

"Now you've done a book, you can do a film," was Marker's advice to the American,

BROADWAY BY LIGHT 1958 © WILLIAM KLEIN (C)

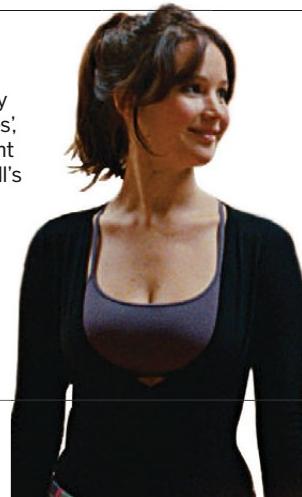
A Nos Amours

The eclectic programme of Joanna Hogg and Adam Roberts's Maurice Pialat-inspired collective continues with a screening of Herk Harvey's macabre B-movie delight 'Carnival of Souls' at the ICA, London on 15 November. www.anosamours.co.uk



Jennifer Lawrence

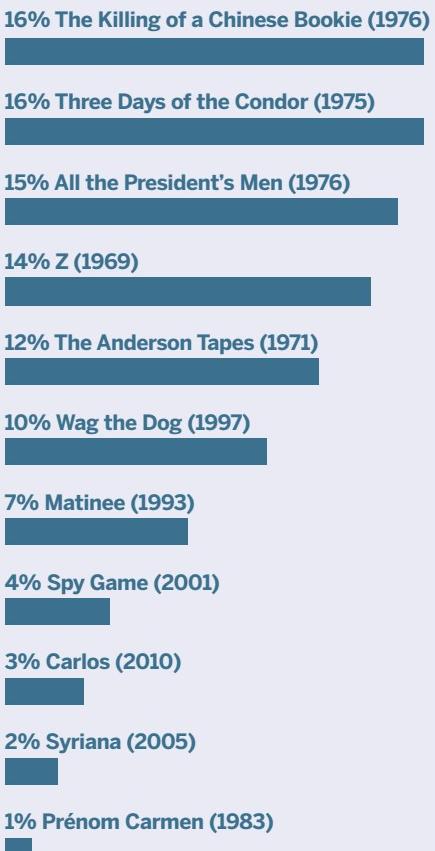
She was a convincing mountain girl in the excellent 'Winter's Bone' (2010) and suitably iconic and mysterious in 'The Hunger Games'; but if you want to see what a scorching talent the 22-year-old is, see her in David O. Russell's 'Silver Linings Playbook', where she fires up scene after scene as a bipolar widow who forces the equally mental-health-issues-afflicted Bradley Cooper (excellent too) to take part in a dance contest. Even toe to toe with Robert De Niro, playing Cooper's OCD dad, she demonstrates a dramatic and comedic range way beyond her years.



ON OUR
RADAR

ANATOMY OF A MOVIE

ARGO



now relocated to Paris. And so, just as Klein had chanced on photography via a series of accidents (winning a Rolleiflex in a poker game and being bewitched by the sense of movement the camera captured when photographing abstract panels he'd painted), he now fell into filmmaking.

With Marker and Alain Resnais as allies, Klein made *Broadway by Light*, a delirious, kaleidoscopic 13-minute tour of Times Square's neon nightscape – a deluge of flashing, fragmented signs and cinema marquees that feels like a berserk animated version of Piet Mondrian's painting *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (Mondrian was Klein's favourite artist). The film didn't receive much attention on its release in 1958 ("the colour is striking but hardly accurate," sniffed the *Monthly Film Bulletin*), but what is now regarded as the first Pop film gets the prominence it deserves at the Tate Modern's current Klein retrospective (where his photographs show in a double bill with those of his fellow street prowler, Japanese photographer Daido Moriyama). Dancing above visitors' heads in the exhibition's entrance, the film clearly demonstrates Klein's skill with both types of 35mm camera, putting his photography and filmmaking on an equal footing.

In the late 1950s and early 60s, while juggling *Vogue* fashion shoots, his own photographic surveys of Moscow, Paris and Tokyo, as well as documentaries for French television, Klein gradually became more drawn to cinema, spending his nights at the Cinémathèque (the film he saw most comes as no surprise: Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*) and appearing with his wife Jeanne as the couple from the future in Marker's *La Jetée*. Meanwhile his time as art director on Louis Malle's *Zazie dans le Métro* (in which the abstract, message-less posters lining Parisian walls are his creations) ensured he learned how a film was put together. With his Pop lust for repetition, Klein was amazed by the rushes and puzzled as to why eight different versions of a scene weren't all used.

When in 1966 he finally embarked on his feature debut, it was an irreverent, slapstick fairytale-cum-spoof which drew heavily on his experiences on the street, in the fashion industry and in French television. The wacky extravaganza *Who Are You, Polly Magoo?* magnified everything that was grotesque and absurd about fashion and the media, setting the maximalist tone for Klein's future features like the unhinged superhero farce *Mister Freedom*

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

Agnès Varda

The French director will be in conversation after a screening of 'Cléo from 5 to 7' (right) at the Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle on 24 November to celebrate the 50th anniversary of her groundbreaking 1962 film. A Varda season also runs from 10 to 18 November. www.tynesidecinema.co.uk



With Marker and Resnais as allies, Klein made 'Broadway by Light', a delirious tour of Times Square's neon nightscape

(1968). "Ten years ahead of its time" was Stanley Kubrick's verdict on *Who Are You, Polly Magoo?* (critics were far more perplexed). Certainly Klein had a knack for being prophetic. *The Model Couple* (1975) predicted reality television years before the phenomenon took hold, while the rebellious, anti-imperialist stance of *Mister Freedom* chimed so heavily with the events of May 1968 (although it had been filmed earlier) that it was banned in France.

Increasingly throughout the 60s and 70s, Klein turned to documentary, drawn to such vivacious, outspoken figures as Muhammad Ali, Eldridge Cleaver and even John McEnroe in *The French* (1981), his roving, behind-the-scenes study of the French Open. Yet, with the exception of *Muhammad Ali, The Greatest* (1974), Klein's films have largely remained overshadowed by his photography, and even now are only just appearing on DVD.

However, the singular visual style for which Klein is so well known can be detected in every one of his films, for which he designed all the bizarre costumes and zany sets, as well as drawing the exploding credit sequences and the posters.

So too can his love of pavement life be traced across his filmography. It's there in his document of the May '68 protests, *Maydays (Grand Soirs et Petits Matins, 1978)*. When in his little-seen *The Little Richard Story* (1980) his subject slips away from him, Klein returns to Richard's hometown – Macon, Georgia – to record the city and the sounds and music emanating from it. Look closely at *Who Are You, Polly Magoo?* and you'll see his camera does crazy things with crowds and street signs and reflections.

Two seconds was what Klein reckoned a great photographer's career amounted to. Tate Modern's upcoming programme of his films gives us a chance to see much more than that. S

i See our website from mid-November for Brian Dillon's interview with William Klein. A season of Klein's films shows at Tate Modern, London from 16 November to 20 January, alongside the exhibition 'William Klein + Daido Moriyama'

Feast of Jazz Film

A triple bill at the London Jazz Festival includes Mike Dibb's touching 'Barbara Thompson, Playing Against Time' and Michael 'Il postino' Radford's wonderful portrait of prodigious three-foot piano genius Michel Petrucciani (right). 10 November, Southbank Centre, London. www.londonjazzfestival.org.uk



'What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?'

The cinema's most unforgettable grotesque tale of sibling rivalry, courtesy of Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, Robert Aldrich's bitch fest is 50 years old this year, and back on the big screen from 14 December. "An anthology of the oldest and most hackneyed devices in thrillerdom," said the MFB on its first release. "And yet, in its curious Gothick way, the film works marvellously as a field day for its actors."



THIS IS HARDCORE

Old Boy's notorious octopus-eating scene is part of a trend prizes authentic experience over CGI fakery



By Hannah McGill

There was a time – one you might recall, depending on your age – when the instantaneous appearance of an electronic message on a screen seemed like straight-up magic, compared with the fusty business of envelopes and human post-people. A few years into habitual digital communication, however, a flip had occurred: instantaneous flickers from across the globe were standard and it was the physical transportation of a letter from hand to far-off hand that seemed quasi-miraculous.

The movie equivalent of this shift is the process whereby lifelike computer generated imagery seemed thrilling until it was standard, whereupon handcrafted objects and stunts done for real came to be prized anew – at least by filmmakers and viewers with an enduring investment in authenticity. It seems notable that high-profile international directors of the artier stripe became increasingly invested in boundary-pushing depictions of unfaked experience just as the big-budget mainstream pursued an ever-less substantial imitation of life. So while *Toy Story* (1995) was making pixels lovable, the Dogme 95 movement fetishised physical immediacy to the extent of prohibiting the use of unnatural lighting; and kerfuffles about real sex in the likes of *Baise-Moi* (2000), *Intimacy* (2000) and *9 Songs* (2004) ran alongside the creation of ever more elaborate simulated bodies in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Star Wars* prequels and the *Matrix* sequels. (The inorganic nature of the product was evidently suited to replication, for here blockbusters began cloning themselves, just like *The Matrix*'s Agent Smith.)

Just as stuntmen are kept under wraps if a star wants to look like a real-life hard man, so CGI – and body doubles, and prosthetics, and stage combat – can be construed as a slick solution for those too effete to take on the work for real. Once it had become perfectly possible to alter Christian Bale's appearance digitally, it was all the more mad and impressive that he shed a third of his real body weight for *The Machinist* (2004). The Bale torso was the equivalent of a puppet from the workshops of Aardman or Tim Burton: physical evidence of painstaking craftsmanship.

By this rationale, why even script a character eating a living octopus if you're not going to have the poor bastard do it for real? Which poor bastard claims your sympathy – man or octopus



Keeping it real: the octopus scene in 'Old Boy', top, and sex in 'Baise-Moi', above, pushed boundaries

– rather depends upon your opinions regarding the rights of cephalopods. The director of *Old Boy* (2003), Park Chanwook, declared that his own sympathies were less with lead actor Choi Min-sik than with the beast that was eaten.



'Irreversible'

(The true death toll was seven; only on the seventh take did Park capture "the tentacles really moving around in a good way.") The scene, not long into the film, has protagonist Oh Daesu entering a sushi bar having recently been freed from years of unexplained incarceration. His tormentor is still sending him cryptic messages. Half-mad with fear and rage, but also drawn to the physical after years without touching or being touched, he tells the waitress that he wants to eat something live. She brings a large octopus that writhes on the plate; he chews it savagely and swallows some before vomiting and collapsing.

Divine ate excrement in *Pink Flamingos* (1972); consumption of grubs and bugs is a standard dare on the survival strand of reality TV shows. Still, *Old Boy's* most grisly and wriggly of gross-out scenes struck a particular

THE FIVE BEST...

FILMS SHOT BY THE LATE HARRIS SAVIDES

chord and retains a grisly fascination. What is more indicative of Eastern ‘otherness’ to a mainstream Western palate than the fondness for raw fish? Sushi carries connotations of sex – via the longstanding association of fish with female sex organs – and poison, via the legend of the blowfish dish that might end it all. For international audiences, the *Old Boy* scene draws on existing suspicions about what ‘orientals’ eat. So as well as providing a good solid shudder of the sort of body horror Julia Kristeva termed “abjection”, and warning Oh Daesu of his imminent undoing through reckless, compulsive sensuality, *Old Boy*’s octopus tickles the audience with their own fear of the extreme other.

The octopus in *Old Boy* isn’t critical to the plot. But like the jaw-droppingly graphic bludgeoning by fire extinguisher that had kicked off the previous year’s Cannes *cause célèbre*, Gaspar Noé’s *Irreversible*, or the dare that kicked off the same director’s *Seul contre tous* (“You have 30 seconds to leave the cinema”), the sushi-bar scene sets the stakes. *Old Boy* is going to go to extremes to unsettle you. In declaring this intent, Park’s film fell in with much of the cinema from South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong that was selling internationally at the time. The fad for ‘extreme’ Asian cinema – horror and gangster movies characterised by dark humour and elaborate, often stylised violence – got going after the international success of Nakata Hideo’s *Ring* (1997).

The ‘extreme’ fad opened many new eyes to Asian cinema (*Old Boy* is known to audiences who’d never have been in the market for a South Korean film but for its notorious content). But as a branding tool, it unabashedly drew on cultural stereotypes to attract curious English-speaking audiences. Weird sex. Sadism. Weird sexual sadism. Ancient ghosts and spirits. Infantilised, sexually

Only on the seventh take did Park capture “the tentacles really moving around in a good way”

available women. Fetishism. Weird food... And somehow, as a result, the content of these ‘extreme’ films tended to draw out repressed stuff in not otherwise racist people. I recall watching Kim Kiduk’s *3-Iron* (2004) with a friend who repeated throughout, “They’re so cruel! They’re so inscrutable!” An infamous review of *Old Boy* by the American critic Rex Reed, meanwhile, made reference to Charlie Chan murder mysteries and “Oriental mumbo-jumbo” before asking, “What else can you expect from a nation weaned on kimchi?” Or, for that matter, raw squid (which, in real life, tends to be served sliced, not whole and wriggling)? Oriental weirdness will get a Hollywood gloss with an upcoming remake of *Old Boy*, due in 2013. Real octopus involvement is unconfirmed, but the story’s notes of otherness, self-disgust and inherited guilt should get director Spike Lee going. ☀



**Harris Savides
(1957-2012)**

The ground-breaking DP, who has died (of brain cancer) tragically young at 55, began as a fashion photographer, but it was his dazzling opening credits for David Fincher’s *Seven* (1994) and the immense subtlety and finish of the lighting in *The Game* (1997) and James Gray’s *The Yards* that made his name. Three regular collaborations marked his career: six features with Van Sant, three with Fincher, and a clutch of music videos with Mark Romanek. The sequence of movies that follows, from Van Sant’s *Gerry* and *Elephant* via Jonathan Glazer’s *Birth* to Fincher’s *Zodiac*, must be one of the most era-defining in recent cinematographic history. Here are five of his greatest achievements, in his own words. For a full obituary, see www.bfi.org.uk/news/memoriam-harris-savides



1 ‘The Yards’ (James Gray, 1999)

“James Gray walked me through a museum once. He wanted me to see things that he liked – Georges de La Tour, a painter who uses candlelight. There’s a kind of muddiness in his blacks, whereas in digital, black is really black. It’s very unnatural.”



2 ‘Gerry’ (Gus Van Sant, 2002)

“*Gerry* was a milestone for me. I felt like I understood filmmaking for the first time. There was no cutting, no elaborate lighting set-ups. In many ways it was the purest form of cinema. In working so simply, I gained a confidence that I never had before.”



3 ‘Elephant’ (Gus Van Sant, 2003)

“Gus wanted to keep the format true to a TV image and shot in the 1.33:1 ratio. We tried to put our information, or most of our characters, in a 1.85:1 aspect ratio and protect the 1.33:1, so we ended up with a very Diane Arbus Rolleiflex composition.”



4 ‘Birth’ (Jonathan Glazer, 2004)

“I light a room and let the people inhabit it, as opposed to lighting the people. It’s more organic. There’s a constant battle between the best light for the face and the best light for the story. You don’t want to get to the point where the audience notices the light.”

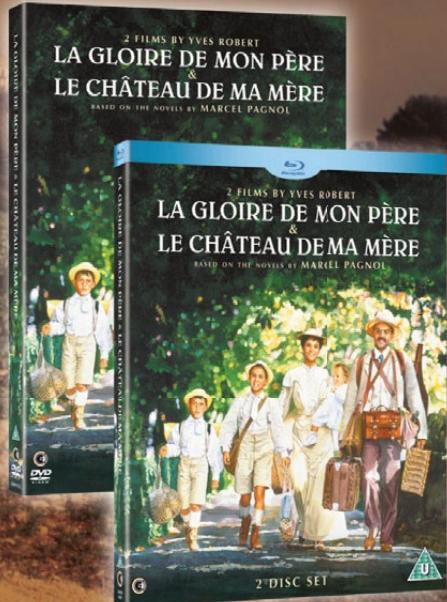
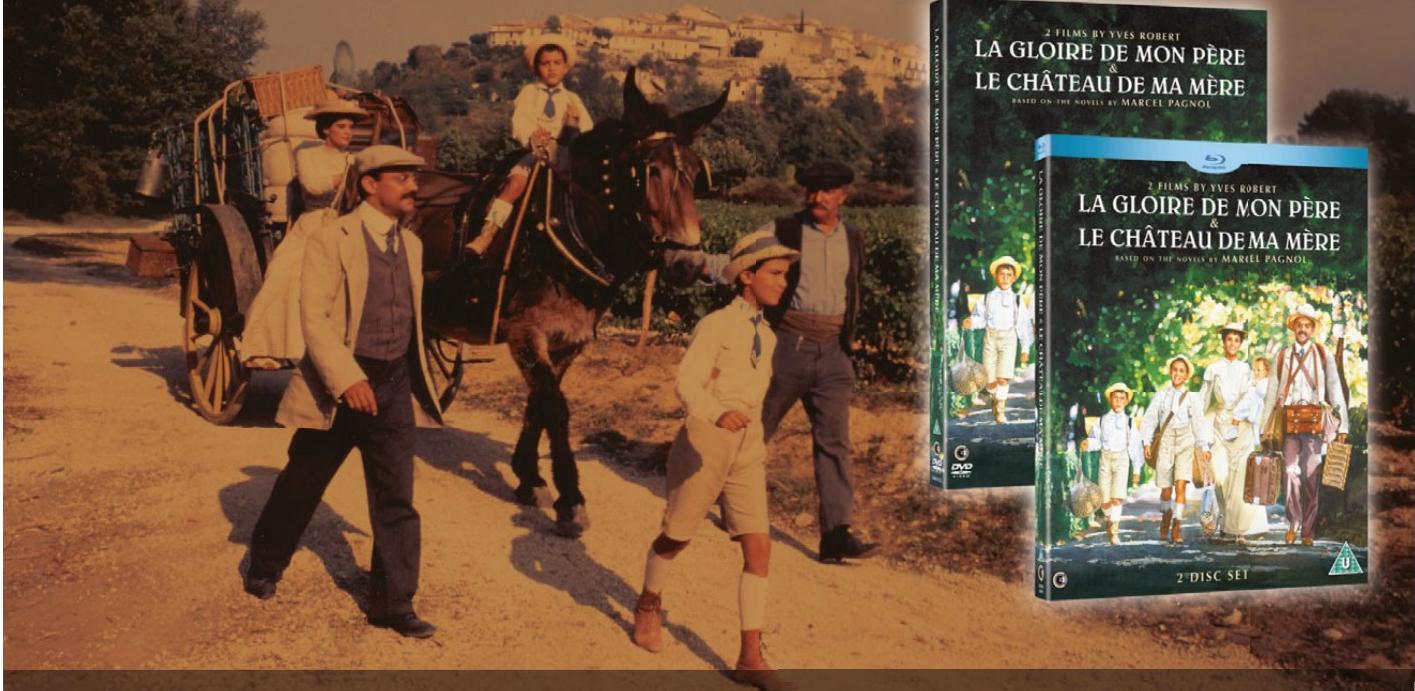


5 ‘Zodiac’ (David Fincher, 2007)

“Movies of the 1970s look a certain way. The photographer Stephen Shore had these banal kind of images of America in the 70s which were a great reference for colours and for props. I didn’t want the synthetic quality of digital to interfere. I did everything I could to make this look like film.”

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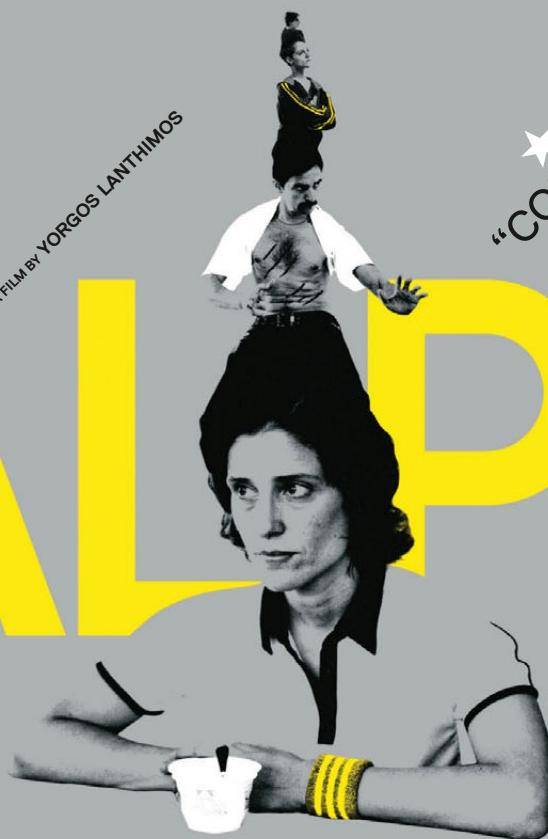


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WHEN THE END IS HERE
THE ALPS ARE NEAR

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“COMPELLINGLY
WEIRD AND
WONDERFUL”
Kate Muir, The Times

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IN CINEMAS &



NOVEMBER 9



ESTATE MANAGEMENT

With *My Brother the Devil*, newcomer Sally El Hosaini transcends the clichés of the urban youth film

By Kieron Corless

Occasionally festival juries get it right. The award for Best British Newcomer at this year's BFI London Film Festival went to writer-director Sally El Hosaini for *My Brother the Devil*, one of the most visually striking British debuts in recent times. It tells of two brothers of Egyptian descent growing up on a Hackney council estate. Elder brother Rashid (James Floyd) is mired in drug-dealing and local gang culture, but determined that younger brother Mo (Fady Elsayed) shouldn't follow suit, preferring him to focus on educational achievement as a way out. Mo has different ideas, of course, and further twists in the tale will place their patiently evoked fraternal bond under pressure.

I probably don't need to remind you of the numerous British horrors mining similar urban territory. Apart from skirting clichés, what El Hosaini brings to the table is a profound understanding of the dislocations often attendant on a mixed cultural heritage (she herself is half Egyptian); a concern for authenticity (particularly East London street argot) which doesn't fetishise or glamorise; a brilliantly chosen and directed cast of mainly non-professionals; and a sensitive figuring of turbulent interior lives through superb camera and sound work. It all adds up to a heartfelt film that lives and breathes.

Kieron Corless: What was the starting point for 'My Brother the Devil'?

Sally El Hosaini: I'd lived in Hackney for over ten years, on the same council estate, and I'd seen a lot of change over that time. I wanted to do a film about two brothers, and because it looked like it was going to be micro micro micro-budget I thought, "Well, I'll just set it on my council estate." In the wake of the London bombings there was a lot of stuff in the press about Arabs and Muslims and a certain kind of image projected, and I thought, "I really want to do the film that's *not* the terrorist film – that's a bit playful, that's actually showing the real things these kids are dealing with."

KC: The older brother Rashid is played by an actor, James Floyd, but the others are mainly non-professionals.

SEH: I met so many fascinating boys during my research and thought, "Wow, they can really act. They could do better than an actor." But I was really worried about casting an actor among non-actors. I wasn't able to find a real boy who was prepared to do the Rashid role. James really impressed me with the amount of hard work he put in just for the audition – it was miles more than anyone else had done. And I realised I needed someone who was going to be Method, and who was going to go and get to know the real guys. All I said to him was: "Don't get arrested."

KC: What were you looking for when you chose your cinematographer?

SEH: With David [Raedecker] what I noticed



Role model: actor James Floyd – as Rashid, right – heads a largely non-professional cast

I needed someone who was going to be Method, and who was going to go and get to know the real guys

was he allowed his camerawork to get messy for the performance. And I had seen other extremely talented cinematographers, but their work was so stunning that it was inaccessible. You almost didn't care about the characters because it was just too good.

I really felt that [Raedecker] was someone who was going to allow space for the actors to blossom. When you're working with non-actors and young actors, it requires someone who's going to be much more spontaneous – in the moment and responding, not coming at it with a very dogmatic "This is the shot" or "This light has moved two inches because an actor kicked it." I needed that more flexible way.

KC: What else were you looking to achieve visually in the film?

SEH: Our main rule was that the shooting style would be subjective, so whenever we composed shots of the brothers we would

always be thinking about the experience of that moment through the five senses. The other big decision that affected the aesthetic was to shoot in Scope. When I was shopping the script around trying to raise money, something a lot of people said to me was, "Oh, it's set on a Hackney council estate. OK, we know what that film is." Well actually, no. Because have you been to Hackney? Have you been on a council estate? There's actually grass – they're not that bad; there's sky, there's flowers, there's trees.

What I realised was that there was this whole thing of outsiders making films looking in, and I thought if there's one aspiration I have, it's for this film to be from the inside looking out. That matched up with our ambition to be very subjective. So we realised that we should make this film an adventure rather than mundane, and Scope made it that – because you're suddenly applying a different way of looking at a world that we're used to seeing on TV screens.

KC: It lifts your film into another dimension.

SEH: And also it allowed us to be very intimate, because you're forced into all these close-ups with Scope. And the actors had better be completely honest, because they're going to show up if they're not.

KC: Your own background clearly informs your depiction of the brothers and their family.

SEH: In a way Rashid has become the dad that his father can't be, because the parents are so out of touch – because they literally come from another world. They don't actually understand the world their sons inhabit. Their sons are living this split because there's them outside, navigating the world, and there's them at home. A lot of Arab people living in the West will identify with that split personality. ☺

i 'My Brother the Devil' is released on 9 November, and is reviewed on page 96



Sally El Hosaini

SOMETHING ROTTEN IN DENMARK

Fourteen years after his second film *Festen* launched Dogme, Thomas Vinterberg is back with the equally hard-hitting *The Hunt*

By Matthew Taylor

"It's a bit like The Shire," muses Thomas Vinterberg on the rural Danish community beset by hysteria in his seventh feature *The Hunt* (*Jagten*). "They're all very good-hearted, like hobbits, but very stern inside. When they feel the strength of togetherness, they can be tough."

Middle Earth might seem an unlikely reference point for the one-time Dogme practitioner and Bergman acolyte. Then again, Vinterberg is the filmmaker who blindsided audiences with the formal provocations of his sensational second film *Festen* (1998), only to renounce Dogme and resurface four years later with a whimsical dystopian romance (*It's All About Love*). *The Hunt* marks a return to *Festen*'s difficult subject-matter, grippingly depicting the persecution of divorced kindergarten teacher Lucas (Mads Mikkelsen) after a false accusation of child abuse.

"The idea was to make the antithesis of *Festen*," Vinterberg explains. "When I made that film, it highlighted one set of victims, but it became apparent that other victims existed in the same situation. I found an opportunity to create a film about friendship, loss of innocence, love – it wasn't just a moral obligation. It began with a psychiatrist giving me a case and saying, 'You should look at this.' I then researched a lot of other similar cases. Many ended with people in prison – [in] some [cases] 30 or 40 people, including local authorities. So we created a fiction but read a lot of material beforehand. And the reality is, as usual, much worse."

The Hunt's liberal, inclusive countryside setting renders the community's knee-jerk accusations all the more sourly ironic. "The fairytale nature of this story means it has to take place in some village, in a forest, far away from everything," says Vinterberg. "It needs to be an experiment inside glass. I see this as almost a Hans Christian Andersen story. You have the good people, the togetherness, the warmth, the innocence – and then this sliver of glass falls in, and everything descends into darkness and fearfulness. [It's like] a virus that spreads through this whole group of people. I find it important when I make a film that there's a sense of a film around it – meaning, these people have a past together; they always refer to this past through their rituals. Therefore families, gatherings, communes – I wrote a play about a commune, which I'm going to film – are really great dramatic material for me."

Lucas's innocence is established early on. Was there ever a temptation to make his character more ambiguous? "We had that in mind for a while, but found it bored us," Vinterberg admits. "It's what an audience would expect. But more importantly, I felt distanced [from] it. I wanted to totally step into the life of this man, and remove any distance between the audience and him. So there was no chance of



Cause for celebration: director Thomas Vinterberg, above, is back with his best film since 'Festen'

playing around with it. Every time we had a suggestive camera angle of Lucas, we had to adjust things; it was actually a big challenge to avoid making him look suspicious. We created this not odd but slightly lonely bespectacled man who works in a kindergarten – so Mads and I had to work hard to keep him innocent."

Did he always have Mikkelsen in mind? "I normally write for specific actors," says Vinterberg. "You can take them out of their element, put them on thin ice. But in the case of Mads it doesn't work, because he wants to see a script. He's a big movie star now. Originally I envisaged the young Robert De Niro from *The Deer Hunter* – then Mads was attached and I rewrote it for him. Lucas changed from being a self-reliant man of few words – a tough guy – to this very humble, civilised, castrated Scandinavian man who finally has to step up. Which was more interesting, I think. And as Mads is such a stallion, I found we had to humble him."

One extraordinary scene sees Lucas

Lucas changed from being a self-reliant tough guy to this castrated Scandinavian man who finally has to step up



Mads Mikkelsen in 'The Hunt'

determined to buy groceries, despite the violent objections of store workers and former friends. "He's just being civilised," Vinterberg explains. "And the moment when he's not civilised any more, that's when people clapped in Cannes, which I find interesting. We're all a bunch of animals! I have a very moral friend in Denmark, director Per Fly – he wanted me to cut that scene out. He said, 'You can't let him down like that. He's your godly figure!' He was morally against it. And this is where all the satisfaction is for the audience." Is it almost as if Lucas is testing this supposedly moral majority on how far they will go? "That's very precise. I've always said that Lucas wants to believe in the good of his community, but in that sense he's also waiting for them to be good – and that's a test."

The Hunt is a bracing addition to the ranks of cinematic witch-hunts, from *Day of Wrath* and *Le Corbeau* to *The Wrong Man*. Vinterberg acknowledges his film is "an old tale in modern clothes", and mentions how he found similarities to his Dogme compatriot Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. But he was, he says, "more inspired by Bergman, as always, and for this one, by my own films – how self-obsessed is that? Of course, it is a mirror of *Festen* somehow. And I had just made *Submarino* [2010], which is entirely blue and very dark. For this film, we constantly talked about creating warmth – putting some orange in the blue."

Fourteen years on, does he still find aspects of Dogme relevant? "Dogme was an attempt to create purity," he points out. "But since then, it's become a kind of fancy-dress. There was a huge element of risk in it, which disappeared on *Festen*'s opening night, when people stood clapping for 13 minutes. It was over, because obviously then it's no longer a risk. Having said that, it was a cleansing moment, a milestone – in the sense that I and others realised you can make films in other ways." 

i 'The Hunt' is released in the UK on 30 November, and is reviewed on page 80

THE RULE OF THREE

A trip to Moscow prompts reflections on angels, Bulgarian paramedics and changing perspectives on the classics



By Mark Cousins

I'm on a flight to Moscow. This'll be my third time in the Russian capital. The first was in 1988, when it was still Soviet. How the place has changed. Thought of such change reminds me of a recent trip to Rome. Late one evening, by the river Tiber, I came across the Ara Pacis. I realised I've seen this Roman peace altar twice before and wondered how many more times I'd see it. Maybe never. Maybe everything should be seen just three times. Maybe this third trip to Moscow should be my last.

Of course this made me think of movies. I saw *Citizen Kane* for the first time when I was 18. After years of anticipation, it seemed somewhat mechanistic and cold. When I saw it a second time, in my late thirties, it had morphed into a film about paradise lost and the un-recuperability of youth. It hadn't changed, though, of course; I had. To think of my own youth was to see the image of snow, of play, of a camera tracking backwards. (Perhaps I'll watch *Kane* one more time.) When as a student I saw Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles*, I wanted to live like the people in it. Ten years later, I convinced a friend to watch it with me, did the big build-up, and put it in the DVD player. The film went on and on without affect or charm.

But we don't just lose, we gain. I first saw Iranian films long before I went to the country. I liked the fine grain of their humanism, the photo-realism of their command of human interaction and community, their sense that such command is not only appealing but unavoidable. Then I drove to Iran in my campervan and saw that the warmth of the films wasn't just a textual hypothesis, it's something that meets you everywhere there. Now when I look at Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon* or Abbas Kiarostami's *And Life Goes On*, I see their humanism starting not from the image outwards (a hope) but coming into the frame from beyond its edges (a fact). What I've experienced in my trips to Iran is not only in the room when I watch films from Iran, it's between me and the screen.

The more we live, the more things are in the room (countries, adventures, trepidations, boredoms, shocks, certainties, abstractions, dreads, sunsets). The movie comes at us at the speed of light, 3×10^8 metres per second, through these things. The light is refracted by its journey through them. The movie reveals itself.

To think of this crowded room is to wonder about films we've never seen. I've never watched *Anatomy of a Murder* or *Donnie Darko*. When I do, will they be better than if I had seen them earlier? If so, the logical conclusion is to watch no films until you are old. Or watch films three times, when you are 15, 45 and 75 – our lives as three-act structures, as triptychs.

I finish this article five days later, after seeing films on the jury of Moscow's 2-in-1 film festival (named after Kira Muratova's film). The best movie was a triptych, *Sofia's Last Ambulance*,

The best movie I saw in Moscow was a triptych, 'Sofia's Last Ambulance', about a team of three Bulgarians



Paramedic trinity: 'Sofia's Last Ambulance'

about a team of three Bulgarians who drive around Sofia on medical emergencies. As in Kiarostami's *10*, we see not the world, just the faces of the three, in close-up, as we hear the screams of patients or the crackle of the radio telling them to go to another incident. One young face, one middle-aged face, one old face. They sit side by side in the cab like they're watching a movie. I identified most with the middle-aged character, but in 15 years' time will I have shifted towards the older doctor?

The day after I saw this film, I went to see Andrei Rublev's most famous icon, *Trinity*, a depiction of the three angels who visit Abraham in 'Genesis'. The greatness of *Sofia's Last Ambulance* comes from the rigour of what it excludes visually – the patients. Rublev's painting excludes Abraham and Sarah, who are usually central to the story. A triptych of rigorous exclusion – of offscreen suffering. The painting is like the poster for the film.

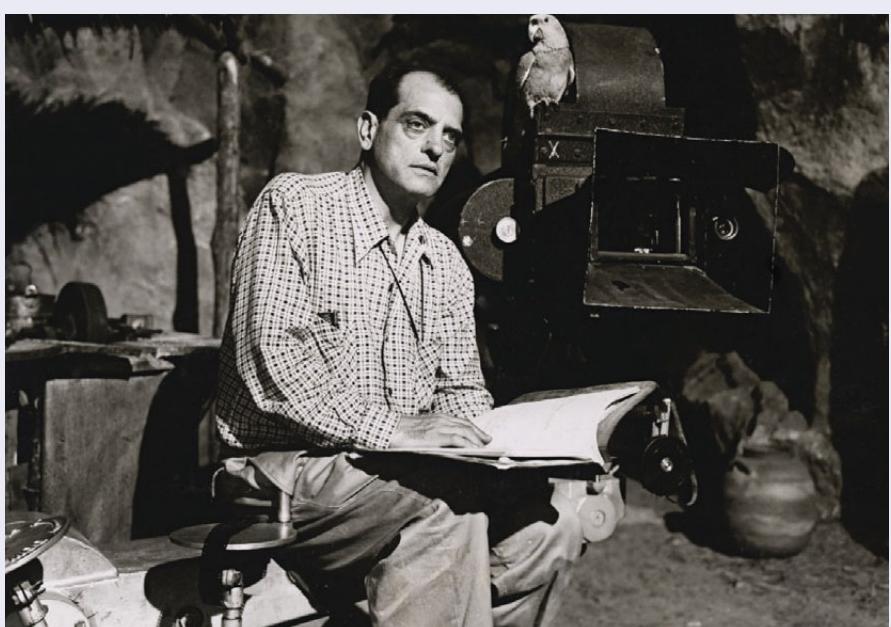
When I go home, I look up Kira Muratova's filmography – and see that one of the few of her films I haven't seen is *Three Stories* (*Tri Istorii*).

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

LUIS BUNUEL

"Our imagination, and our dreams, are forever invading our memories; and since we are all apt to believe in the reality of our fantasies, we end up transforming our lies into truths. Of course, fantasy and reality are equally personal, and equally felt, so their confusion is a matter of only relative importance."

From his autobiography 'My Last Breath', translated from the French 'Mon dernier soupir' (1982) by Abigail Israel



DEVELOPMENT TALE

AMERICAN PI



Animal magic: 'Life of Pi' benefited from a protracted development schedule as it allowed digital technology to catch up with the demands of the book

Yann Martel's bestselling fantasy adventure was always going to be a hot property in Hollywood but it still took years to reach the screen

By Charles Gant

When a book wins the Man Booker Prize and goes on to sell millions of copies worldwide, Hollywood will always have its eye on a film adaptation. But in the case of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, the challenges were daunting. The story of a shipwrecked 17-year-old Indian boy on a lifeboat with a zebra, hyena, orangutan and Bengal tiger, it seemed to have a potential mismatch between the budget needed to mount the production and the likely commercial appeal. Even if you get it right, there's no role for a major movie star – how do you sell *Cast Away* without Tom Hanks?

At Fox 2000, the division of 20th Century Fox that has created hits from books such as *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Marley & Me* and the *Percy Jackson* series, president Elizabeth Gabler loved *Life of Pi* from the start, but her interest only became firm when, a year after its 2001 publication, in-house producer Gil Netter announced he had a screenwriter who had come up with a promising take on the material. Optioning the book for Dean Georgaris to

adapt, Gabler and Netter began a journey that would take exactly ten years to complete.

The first speed bump was that Georgaris – who at the time had yet to see a screenplay made into a feature, but whose credits now include *The Manchurian Candidate* remake – never actually delivered a script to Fox, due to delays in his schedule. Consequently, when M. Night Shyamalan signalled an interest in writing and directing his own adaptation, Gabler jumped at the opportunity. But Shyamalan also proved too busy.

"He never did anything either," explains Gabler. "He was really unavailable due to all the different movies he was making, and we were reluctant to wait, so we moved on. Those two people never did anything, apart from having meetings with us. I'm sure that Dean did work, but I don't know what it was, because we never saw it."

A fresh start arrived in 2005 in the form of Jean-Pierre Jeunet, with co-writer Guillaume Laurant, and several screenplay drafts followed throughout 2006. But Jeunet's insistence that only live animals be used caused too many headaches for Fox. Says Gabler, "We tried very hard to see how to make his version, but at that time, the advances in technology were not strong enough to where he felt comfortable using CG animals. The process he wanted to use, we thought, was fraught

with danger. For example, you would have to have the tiger in the boat. You couldn't put a hyena in the same boat. You'd have to wash it out with bleach and then shoot the hyena. You obviously couldn't put a child or a young man in the boat with the tiger, or any of those other animals either. So it was a constant switching, and different boats, and none of us could figure out a way to make sense to do it that was within any reasonable time period and consequently budget. Every time we went back to the drawing board, it just escalated. And so it was a sad parting of the ways."

Although it was reported in the trade press that Alfonso Cuarón was also in the mix to direct, Gabler insists he was never involved. Instead, it was interest from Ang Lee that finally broke the logjam.

"It was my dream to work with Ang," says Gabler. "He's one of those directors you literally hope that you have something good enough to submit to some day. And he'd passed on everything we'd sent him so far. One of our chairmen at the time, Tom Rothman, was close to him – he was the man who distributed *The Wedding Banquet* when he was at the Samuel Goldwyn Company, and they made *The Ice Storm* at Fox Searchlight. So I met him, and Ang said, 'Why would a studio want to make this movie?' But we knew that he had made movies of very difficult subject-matters and made them

THE NUMBERS: GERMAN CINEMA IN THE UK

accessible and commercial worldwide. He really has taken on many different genres. As my boss Tom said, 'If he's afraid of it, you have a chance to get him.' And I guess that proved true."

Lee was committed to *Taking Woodstock* at that time, but finally, after eight months, was ready to turn his attention to *Pi*. For the screenwriter, Gabler's suggestion of *Finding Neverland* scribe David Magee immediately struck a chord. "Ang said, 'Oh, I've been dying to work with him. In fact we almost did a project together a couple of years ago, but there were some rights issues on it and it fell apart.' It was fortuitous. David was a big fan of the book, and was obviously still dying to work with Ang as well. In his first draft, you could see the movie. They did a lot of research, a lot of travelling. He had a lot of artistic consultants working with him; he had one survivor of a pretty long stretch on a shipwreck. A lot of veracity

It was a long process and there were times when it was not going to happen. There were definitely moments of darkness

went into the creation of the screenplay."

Asked to explain the difference in the approaches of Lee and Jeunet, Gabler says: "Ang explores all the different theological and philosophical threads of the book much more, and the scope of the drama is very different. Ang's film has a giant scope as far as the shipwreck, the experiences that Pi has. Everything is just much more dramatic and critical and realistic. Jean-Pierre's was a much more, if you would, whimsical version."

At Fox, Gabler reported to joint chairmen Rothman and Jim Gianopoulos (Rothman has since departed), and needed their approval to get it greenlit. "It was a long process, and there were times when it absolutely was not going to happen. There were definitely moments of darkness. Finally we got everything to a place where they felt it was actually physically possible, and the budget was where they were comfortable. Ang had brought the audition of Suraj Sharma, his choice for Pi, a 12-minute tape, and he also did a very extensive pre-visualisation of the shipwreck sequence. When we saw both those things together, that was the defining moment when they said, 'OK, you can make the movie.'"

It didn't hurt that Lee was keen to explore 3D, which helped position *Life of Pi* as a mainstream spectacle, rather than a niche literary adaptation. But in the end it was the protracted development period that finally worked in the film's favour, with digital technology catching up with the demands posed by the book. Says Gabler, "The technological advances that have been made were a giant, giant help. I feel, I hope, we are at a place right now where audiences are looking for something original, something that reaffirms the strength of the human spirit, and this movie does that." ☀



'Life Of Pi' opens on 20 December, and will be reviewed in a future issue

By Charles Gant

On the last Friday of September, two foreign-language films were pitched at the UK's arthouse cinema fans on the eve of the BFI London Film Festival, hoping to take advantage of what can be a relatively uncluttered market. And in the battle between Leos Carax's 'Holy Motors' and Christian Petzold's 'Barbara', it was clear that the latter was always going to be the underdog. A Cannes darling, Artificial Eye's 'Holy Motors' benefited from a highly visible press campaign and lead reviews in the broadsheets, including five stars from Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*. 'Barbara', from Soda Pictures, was also well reviewed, but often less ecstatically and less prominently.

While Soda distribution boss Kate Gerova agrees that "reviews remain highly important for world-cinema movies", the trajectory of the two films confirms that critical heat is only part of the story. While 'Holy Motors' dominated the first weekend with £49,000 from 23 screens, compared with 'Barbara' on £23,000 with 12, successive strong holds from the German picture meant that by week three, it found itself four places higher than 'Holy Motors' in the UK box-office chart. After 24 days of play, 'Barbara' had an impressive gross of £130,826. Although Soda had discussed moving its film after 'Holy Motors' muscled in on its chosen release date, Gerova explains, "We were always relying on the fact that it was 'Barbara' that was going to get the word of mouth. We had to hold our nerve. We just felt that audiences would respond, and they did."

When acquiring the title after the Berlin Film Festival, nationality was never viewed by Soda as a selling point. "I cannot say that there is a German audience in the UK in the way that there is definitely a French audience," says Gerova. "It really does all come back to the quality of the film." Nevertheless, the box-office chart below tells its own story. While an equivalent chart for French-language films would prominently feature romance ('Amélie'), comedy ('Untouchable'), thrillers ('Tell No



Against the wall: Nina Hoss in 'Barbara'

One') and biopics celebrating French cultural icons ('La Vie en rose', 'Coco Before Chanel'), UK audiences for German stories have been more commonly drawn to political fare. The Communist era in East Germany, in particular, has given rise to 'Good Bye, Lenin!', 'The Lives of Others' and now the 1980-set 'Barbara'.

For Gerova, the success of these films is more about authenticity, a topic that emerged in the recent London Film Festival industry discussion, 'Understanding the Hearts and Minds of UK Audiences': "'The Lives of Others' and 'Downfall' and now 'Barbara' shine this very authentic light for an audience," says Gerova. "[They are] so believable, and they just put you there, and that's the thing that resonates. And if there is a political strength, then good. In the cinema landscape as a whole, you don't necessarily see audiences coming out for politicised film." ☀

GERMAN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Lives of Others	2007	£2,700,311
Downfall	2005	£1,903,407
Good Bye, Lenin!	2003	£875,618
Pina	2011	£666,263
The Counterfeiters	2007	£661,069
The White Ribbon	2009	£647,896
Run Lola Run	1998	£476,066
The Baader Meinhof Complex	2008	£427,074
The Edukators	2004	£287,900
Barbara	2012	£130,826*

*still on release

THE LAST TABU?



Hunting for audiences: 'Tabu' failed to translate critical approbation into commercial success

Is *Tabu*'s disappointing showing at the UK box office a sign that press critics are losing their influence over the arthouse crowd?

By David Locke

The changing role and nature of film criticism has been debated at length in previous editions of *Sight & Sound*, especially with regard to the proliferation of new social media. We now find ourselves in an increasingly digital environment where access to potential consumers is instant, and largely unfiltered.

One relatively hard and fast rule for distributors looking to release specialised product into a competitive marketplace has been to seek positive notices from prominent critics. Niche/foreign-language/specialised (delete as per preference) titles seeking UK distribution have always stood a much better chance of being acquired if they had the support of the press, especially the broadsheets. The advocacy of *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw, in particular, has become increasingly important, and the general industry perception is that, where a specialised title is concerned, he alone has the power to translate words into ticket sales.

A positive critical opinion, distilled into a soundbite, has usually been essential to form one plank of the film's press and advertising campaign – alongside other marketable factors such as the auteur's status and, if possible, a festival prize or two.

In the past couple of years, several supposedly difficult titles have received positive reviews and gone on to overachieve: Nuri Bilge Ceylan's epic *Once upon a Time in Anatolia*, Patricio Guzmán's masterful *Nostalgia for the Light* and

Niche titles seeking UK distribution have always stood a better chance of being acquired if they had the support of the press

the documentary *Bill Cunningham: New York* are three that come to mind. But what happens when a film seemingly has everything lined up – critical approbation and an appealing campaign – and yet fails to make any impression on the more adventurous filmgoer?

There are many examples of this, but perhaps none so significant in recent memory as *Tabu*, by Portuguese director Miguel Gomes. This FW Murnau-inspired reflection on Europe's colonial past won both the FIPRESCI prize and the Alfred Bauer award. An impish poetic meditation on melodrama, slapstick and passion, it was praised to the rafters. With all doubts about *Tabu*'s marketability banished by the critical acclaim, UK indie distributors jostled to bag it. Of course, *Tabu* had no hope of achieving the success of *The Artist* – to which it was erroneously compared – and its director is not yet well known in this country, but when released on 7 September with all the required elements in place, it was expected to find an appreciative, if select, audience.

The Daily Telegraph's Tim Robey and *The Independent on Sunday*'s Jonathan Romney both awarded it five stars, while distributor New Wave must have been particularly delighted when Bradshaw's rave review appeared. Under a bold headline declaring that the film "isn't just for cinephiles", he called it "a gem".

And yet, and yet... Released in a sensible 11 locations, *Tabu* took a very disappointing three-day gross of £9,751. It's first seven days at its lead location in London's West End garnered a shade over £5k. As a point of comparison, *Barbara*'s first weekend gross was greater than *Tabu*'s total first-week takings.

It is difficult to pinpoint why audiences didn't respond to *Tabu*. The film was released during a spate of inclement weather, but that didn't affect *The Queen of Versailles*, released on the same date. So if the critics, Bradshaw included, are no longer an effective barometer of what the arthouse public will go for, what new tactics and reserves can distributors and exhibitors draw on to reach their prospective audiences? It will be intriguing to see what emerges. **S**

IN PRODUCTION

● **Joanna Hogg**, director of 'Unrelated' and 'Archipelago', has started shooting her third feature. Currently known only as the 'London Project', the film stars Viv Albertine (ex-guitarist of The Slits) and conceptual artist Liam Gillick. There are no confirmed details of the story, but introducing a recent London screening of Tarkovsky's 'Mirror', presented by Hogg's programming venture 'A nos amours', Hogg said she had shown Tarkovsky's film to her cast and crew for inspiration.

● **Andrei Ujica**, the Romanian director of 'Out of the Present' and 'The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu', is at work on a film about one day in the life of The Beatles – 15 August 1965, the day the Fab Four played New York's Shea Stadium.

● **Catherine Breillat** has been shooting her latest feature in Brussels. Entitled 'Abus de faiblesse' ('Abuse of Weakness') and based on her 2009 book of the same name, the film recounts the story of Christophe Rocancourt, a friend of Breillat's who was due to star in her planned film 'Bad Love', but who Breillat later accused of embezzling €650,000 (£530,000). The film stars Isabelle Huppert and French rapper Kool Shen.

● **Peter Strickland** is reportedly to follow 'Katalin Varga' and 'Berberian Sound Studio' with an adaptation of Penelope Fitzgerald's 1988 novel 'The Beginning of Spring', following a man who inherits a struggling printworks in Moscow.

● **Gerardo Naranjo**, the Mexican director of 'I'm Gonna Explode' and 'Miss Bala', is at work on two projects: a political thriller entitled 'A Man Must Die', and 'The Mountain Between Us', an English-language adventure starring Michael Fassbender.

● **David Fincher** (below) is reportedly considering adapting Jules Verne's '20,000 Leagues Under the Sea' as his next project, as screenwriter Steve Zaillian continues work on the second part of 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo' saga. Fincher's regular star Brad Pitt is rumoured to be interested in the Captain Nemo role.



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ALEX GIBNEY

The prolific documentary-maker has the business acumen to get projects off the ground in spite of their difficult subject-matter

By Geoffrey Macnab

Alex Gibney is a powerhouse in US documentary: an Oscar-winning director (for *Taxi to the Dark Side*) but also a producer with his own company, Jigsaw Productions. He is both prolific and resourceful in how he finances films and gets them into distribution.

"The knack of raising money is figuring out first of all who would be interested in giving money to any particular film," he suggests. "Those people are completely different." It helps, too, that he has a record of "coming in on budget" and has had a number of financial successes. "Then, you look for opportunities... Somebody wants a film done on such and such. Then, you think, 'Well, is that interesting to me? Could I make that into an interesting story?' You decide on that basis because you know there is money attached. To be honest, very often the choices made in terms of what films to do are sometimes market-based, not purely creative."

Gibney was passing through London in mid-October, accompanying his latest feature doc *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God* to the London Film Festival. The HBO-backed film, which painstakingly documents sex-abuse scandals within the Catholic church, following a trail from Milwaukee to the Vatican, is being given a theatrical release in the US.

At the same time Gibney was also busy finishing his Lance Armstrong doc, *The Road Back* (as it was originally titled.) Supported by Sony Pictures, this focuses on Armstrong's attempt to come out of retirement in 2009 to try to win the Tour de France yet again. Inevitably, the revelations about doping in the cycling world have forced Gibney to rework the film.

Meanwhile, he has also recently completed *The Last Gladiators*, a doc about Chris 'Knuckles' Nilan, an ice hockey enforcer, which is being 'roadshowed' by its US distributors, shown on one-night stands at cities across America with Nilan in attendance.

There is a constant that runs through much of Gibney's work. From *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005) to *Client-9: The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer* (2010), to *Mea Maxima Culpa* to the Lance Armstrong doc, the films have explored characters or institutions that have pursued a code of silence when it comes to their own wrongdoing. "I am interested in deception and self-deception," he states.

The challenge is financing films that probe such uncomfortable areas. "It's always different," Gibney says. "I tell people who are raising money that you have to think of it like a political campaign."

Gibney's career doesn't tally with romantic images of American documentary-makers like D.A. Pennebaker or the Maysles brothers making films on the hoof. He is a businessman as well as an artist. "Everything changed for me when I wrote and produced a film called *The*



Business as usual: Alex Gibney is a long way from the old stereotype of a dreamy documentary-maker

Trials of Henry Kissinger, which no broadcaster would touch," he recalls. The film, partly supported by the BBC, finally reached an audience in cinemas. It dawned on the director that even if he couldn't rely on TV to support his films, they could potentially work on the big screen. "That taught me a lesson, a good lesson, that there can be a market for well-told stories."

There have been anguished debates in documentary circles recently about how close filmmakers should allow themselves to become to their corporate patrons. Gibney's argument is that it doesn't really matter where the money comes from as long as there is transparency and the director maintains editorial control. On *Client-9*, his backers included Wall Street investors who clearly were hoping he would do a demolition job on disgraced former New York governor Spitzer, who had targeted the financial sector before resigning in the wake of a sex scandal. "A lot of investment in that came from hedge-fund guys who, I think, wanted to revel in Spitzer's embarrassment," he recalls. Gibney made it clear to his investors that he wasn't interested in muckraking and that they would have no impact on the tone of the film. "The deal with them was explicit. You put the money into an account. So long as I don't go over budget, I have access to that account and you don't. That's it, pure and simple."

He also acknowledges that broadcasters can have agendas. "You have to be careful. It's tough out there being able to maintain editorial independence. Sometimes, it helps to have access to the markets and to be able to balance other interests." If you make the film entertaining, he suggests, you may have a better chance of being allowed to say what you want.

To be honest, the choices made in terms of what films to do are sometimes market-based, not purely creative

Nor is the director apologetic about his recent deal with the Content Media Corporation, which saw Content buying a 50-per-cent stake in his company, Jigsaw. "The deal was supposed to be an economic alliance. The idea was that Content was going to allow me to grow my company," Gibney says. "The key aspect for me was that there were no restrictions put on what kind of projects I could do or what kind of partners I could do them with."

Through the alliance, the filmmaker suggests, he now has "clout" in the marketplace when it comes to launching his own projects or those of other directors whose work he produces.

Gibney fights his corner in an aggressive fashion that doesn't tally with the stereotype of documentary-makers as dreamy types without a head for business. He sued distributor THINKFilm when it failed to capitalise on the Oscar won by *Taxi to the Dark Side*. He admits the part it played in helping win the Oscar, but was dismayed by the lack of follow-up. "It wasn't like, 'Oh gosh, I should have had bigger grosses!'" he says. "We took THINKfilm to arbitration because we were astonished that when we won the Oscar... there was no publicity, no prints in theatres and nothing happened."

Generally, Gibney produces as well as directs his films. "It gives you more control. I am pretty good at raising money and I am pretty good at reassuring the people that I raise money from that I am not going to go over budget."

One reason his films reach audiences is arguably that he is sympathetic, even to the ostensible villains. "Very often, when you get up close with somebody, you can't help but be interested in them as human beings," he says. "On the Enron film, there was a lot of pressure on me to make my portrait of [bosses] Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling more vicious... I said, 'I am sorry, you may think that is more commercially viable for you, but I am interested in them as human beings.' If they become monsters, then we can't see how we are complicit in frauds like Enron. The fact is these are human traits." ☀

BUSAN

STEALING THE SHOW



Daylight robbery: Choi Donghoon's charismatic heist caper 'The Thieves' has become South Korea's biggest domestic hit at the box office

Busan is an eccentric mix of devout cinephilic respect and rampant, high-gloss commercialism – with an excellent selection of films

By David Jenkins

Before each screening at the 17th Busan International Film Festival, an announcement is made asking that no one exit the auditorium until all credits have rolled. There's even one cinema where it is politely requested that patrons do not cross their legs during screenings in order to avoid kicking the seat in front. And yet the large majority of screenings take place in vast, neon-hued multiplexes that reek of synthetic butter and are situated on the upper floors of two adjoining (and gigantic) department stores. This eccentric combination of devout cinephilic respect and rampant, high-gloss commercialism neatly sums up Busan, as it's a festival where executive programmer Kim Jiseok has pulled together a commendably broad (and largely excellent) selection of titles, which then play out in a landscape littered with skyscrapers, architectural follies and roads that are as wide as they are long.

Since 2006, South Korea's biggest domestic

box-office hit had been Bong Joonho's mutant tadpole satire *The Host* (which in itself is a strange mix of high art and big money), but it was finally – and perhaps understandably – toppled this year by Choi Donghoon's charismatic heist caper *The Thieves* (*Dodoodeul*), which received a triumphant outdoor screening at the festival's Film Centre. Like all of Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's* films rolled into one, this polished saga sees a gang of crack Korean art thieves deciding to team up with their Hong Kong-based counterpart to pull off an impossible-odds diamond heist in Macao.

The Thieves was actually the second-best film set in Macao at the festival, as top honours go to João Pedro Rodrigues and João Rui Guerra da Mata's sublime *The Last Time I Saw Macao* (*A Última Vez Que Vi Macau*). Part city symphony, part post-colonial essay film, part lurid neo-noir and part romantic homage to Sternberg and Marker, this dazzling and original work follows a Portuguese filmmaker to Macao at the harried request of an old transsexual paramour, who claims to be in trouble. Employing a hard-boiled mystery template as an excuse to dissect the cultural evolution of a city, it's a film that cements Portugal's cinematic-powerhouse status and would play in a neat double bill with Miguel Gomes's *Tabu*.

The best new Korean title I saw this year was Jeon Kyuhwan's extraordinary hardcore gothic fantasia *The Weight* (*Muge*), which frankly wipes the floor with Kim Kiduk's operatically awful Venice Golden Lion-winner *Pietà*. Cleverly recalibrating Korean cinema's predilection for harrowing violence and protracted misery, Jeon offers a lightly surreal and darkly comic retelling of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, here with the hunchback as a monosyllabic

Films play out in a landscape littered with skyscrapers, architectural follies and roads that are as wide as they are long



Dance macabre: 'The Weight'

TRIESTE EYE OF THE STORM

mortician who goes to bizarre lengths to care for his unhinged brother, a pre-op transsexual.

Japan's ultra-prolific Sono Sion returned with his most sedate film in some time, *The Land of Hope* (*Kibo no kuni*), an absurdist parable in the vein of *Passport to Pimlico* that concerns a family whose house is right on the edge of a nuclear fallout boundary. It's a patchy film which perhaps could have been edited a little more tightly, but Sono's political and emotional insights remain piercing and he proves yet again – this time with assiduous use of Mahler's *Symphony No. 10* – that he's a guy who really knows his classical music.

China's Wang Bing brought his traumatising but brilliant Venice Orizzonti prizewinner *Three Sisters* (*San zimei*) to Busan, and again there was a small irony to viewing an epic (but intimate) documentary about chronic poverty and child labour in the Chinese countryside while sitting above eight glistening floors of consumer goods. At nearly two-and-a-half hours, it's what you might call a tough film, but Wang's rigorous technique, languorous pacing and unflagging empathy for his subjects (three dirt-poor, pre-teen sisters) puts him right up there with Pedro Costa as one of cinema's high poets of the disenfranchised masses.

Iran's Mohsen Makhmalbaf returned with a plea for peace and religious tolerance in his occasionally charming DV experiment *The Gardener*. Filmed in Israel's Hanging Gardens of Haifa and comprising a series of theatrically staged father-son dialogues, it could be seen as a radical articulation of Makhmalbaf's fervent ideological preoccupations or an overly poeticised mélange of half-baked ideas about religion, conflict and image-making.

The one film that offered an entirely opposing view of art and commercialism (and one which would be of unique interest to *Sight & Sound* readers) is Seo Wontae's 56-minute documentary portrait *Tony Rayns and a Quarter Century of Korean Cinema*. Rayns, who somehow manages to balance life as a journalistic powerhouse and a kind of Western gatekeeper to new Asian cinema, ruefully explains the meaning of the term "hand-to-mouth existence" to a table of young directors in a bar. They simply laugh at the notion and gulp back their beer. With its declarations of love and respect from Lee Changdong, Hong Sangsoo and other Korean luminaries, Seo's film is less a cover-all life story than it is a lilting portrait of a lone man attempting to retain his independent ideals in the face of an all-encroaching capitalist scourge. Which kind of sums up Busan as a whole, really. ☀



Mystery games: 'The Last Time I Saw Macao'

By Simon Merle

Trieste's I Mille Occhi is one of those many small festivals held day in, day out all over the world. It runs for seven days in the lone arthouse of Italy's easternmost city, mainly for a local audience. Foreigners are warmly welcomed, of course, but they will have to know the language. Given the festival's minuscule budget, it's impossible for it to subtitle everything in English, and equally impossible to show too much in English or with English-only subtitles. This means programming a lot of Italian films – and worse things could happen, as artistic director Sergio Matiassich (formerly Grmek) Germani and his team demonstrated once again this September.

What makes I Mille Occhi such a remarkable endeavour is its attitude: it shows almost exclusively 'old' films, but doesn't consider itself a place for historians or archivists – it's not looking back. For I Mille Occhi, a film is always new because times change, which makes a difference to the way we see the work; if the festival is interested in a film or a director at a certain moment in time, there's a reason for it. There are few places where programmers have such trust in their own civic instincts, not to mention their curiosity. Germani calls it research, in line with the Rossellinian spirit that animates the event as a whole.

I Mille Occhi shows almost exclusively 'old' films, but doesn't consider itself a place for historians – it's not looking back

Appropriately, a few of Germani's choices were gambles. To give one example: Gianni Fontaine's 'Okiba, non vendermi!' (1955), a film considered lost and only recently found by a young collector in one of those magic attics. For Germani, that's reason enough to show it – he had to see it, so why not do that in good company? – and he programmed it unseen. 'Okiba, non vendermi!' turned out to be a nice find: a remarkably assured piece of missionary cinema with often surprising grit. For additional edge, Germani presented it with a pair of little-seen gems on religious subjects: Guido Brignone's slightly screwy heritage comedy 'Ginevra degli Almieri' (1935) and Oreste Palella's done-with-papal-blessings biopic 'Caterina da Siena' (1947). Both proved quite rewarding to watch, 'Ginevra degli Almieri' for its supreme craftsmanship, 'Caterina da Siena' for its lack of it; made immediately after World War II, with scarcely any means and a third-echelon director, the film is moving in the same way as a parish passion-play. It's these kinds of dynamics – inspired guesses combined with enormous knowledge and the guts to act on both – that make I Mille Occhi so special.

This edition's programme was organised around the complete works of director Valerio Zurlini, occasioned by a genuine historical find: 'La promessa' (1970), the sole television



OKIBA, non vendermi

A rare find: 'Okiba, non vendermi!'

movie Zurlini ever did. It was aired once on the Italian TV channel RAI, and that was it; the screening at I Mille Occhi marked its second-ever presentation. 'La promessa' is so arcane that it's not even mentioned in any of the major studies of Zurlini; Germani only found out about it during his research into Gianni Da Campo, Zurlini's sole pupil. Initial research suggested the film was lost; then, by the kind of accident that happens when the conscious seeker keeps his sensors synched to certain signs, an RAI employee found the tapes in a corner of the channel's archive.

'La promessa' proved quite the revelation: humble in size as it is compared with the robust grandeur of Zurlini's other works, its artistic decisiveness is on a par with that of his masterpieces like the Golden Lion-winner 'Family Diary' ('Cronaca familiare', 1962) or 'The Desert of the Tartars' ('Il deserto dei Tartari', 1976). In some ways, with its three chapters detailing the lives of three Leningraders from the midst of the siege during World War II to the late stage of the thaw, 'La promessa' plays like a microcosm of Zurlini's unrealised multi-part epic 'Il paradiso all'ombra delle spade', which would have chronicled more than a century of Italian colonial history. As Zurlini was such a melancholic, it seems fitting his greatest dream was realised only in morsels: the main arc and general narrative thrust here; the setting in his African passion 'Out of Darkness' ('Seduto alla sua destra', 1968); the final chapter in 'La prima notte di quiete' (1972); the initial idea (a meditation on the nature of duty) in 'The Desert of the Tartars'.

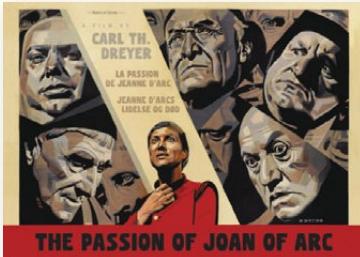
Zurlini's early demise – as well as the small number of features he was able to direct (nine including 'La promessa') – make him something of an unfinished master. I Mille Occhi went to uncommon lengths to give as full a picture of his work as possible, which meant not only showing masses of miscellanea (commercials; a documentary on his friend Alberto Burri; a tape of a theatrical production) but also listing in the programme several unrealised projects, alongside the death of Pasolini and a painting Zurlini wasn't able to see on his last visit to Venice – elements of a mental landscape that materialises in part through the films actually screened. I Mille Occhi is a festival that sees itself as an eye in the storm of history – a moment of calm around which everything that could and should and shouldn't have been rages and swirls. ☀

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COMPETITIONS

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Masters of Cinema presents a new restoration of Carl Theodor Dreyer's enigmatic *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, now for the first time making its way to Blu-ray. The film is also available on DVD, and in a limited dual-format SteelBook edition with extras featuring two playback speeds, optional audio tracks, optional newly translated English subtitles, an illustrated booklet with the words of Dreyer and much more.



To be in with a chance of winning a SteelBook edition, simply answer the following question:

Q. Which actress took the role of Joan of Arc in a later film directed by Victor Fleming?

- a. Ingrid Bergman
- b. Vivien Leigh
- c. Greta Garbo

PERFORMANCE : FIVE COPIES OF BOOK ON THE CULT FILM TO BE WON

It was a film that brought together London's violent gangster subculture and the hedonistic world of 1960s rock stardom. In his 'biography' of *Performance*, author Paul Buck offers new and surprising insights into how the film was made, putting each step of its creation into context. Drawing on over

40 years of research and sources, including his own interviews with participants, *Performance: A Biography of the Classic Sixties Film* (published by Omnibus Press) takes a fresh look at Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg's landmark film.

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Q. Which award did the film NOT win at Sundance this year?

- a. The Special Jury Prize
- b. The Grand Jury Prize
- c. The Audience Award



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This lavish edition of official motion-picture archives from Carlton Books celebrates the 40th Anniversary of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*. Film historian Peter Cowie concentrates on the elements that combined to make the film so successful when it was released in 1972, including Mario Puzo's best-selling

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Q. Turner's bohemian residence is in which area of London?

- a. Chelsea
- b. Soho
- c. Notting Hill



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Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'The Passion of Joan of Arc SteelBook edition', 'Searching for Sugar Man', 'Performance book', or 'The Godfather Archives' in the subject heading, to s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk. Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'The Passion of Joan of Arc competition', 'Searching for Sugar Man competition', 'Performance book competition', or 'The Godfather Archives competition' at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN. **The deadline for all competitions is Tuesday 11 December 2012**

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HEARTS AND MINDS

The title character of 'The Master' may be loosely based on Scientology guru L. Ron Hubbard, but writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson's sixth feature is vastly more than just a veiled biopic, drawing on rich strands of philosophy, period recreation and psychological excavation

By Graham Fuller



Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* is a disturbingly intimate filial drama with epic reach, as rich, ravishing and awing in 2012 as *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause* must have seemed in 1955. Its protagonist, Joaquin Phoenix's demobbed World War II sailor Freddie Quell, is perhaps the most compelling casualty to appear in American cinema since Randle McMurphy in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* or Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*. The movie's abiding spirit, however, isn't James Dean, Jack Nicholson or Robert De Niro, but Orson Welles.

In Anderson's last film *There Will Be Blood* (2007), Daniel Day-Lewis impersonated John Huston, which allowed the director to analyse *Chinatown*'s Noah Cross with the Los Angeles oil baron Edward L. Doheny, on whom Day-Lewis's Daniel Plainview was based (by way of Upton Sinclair's 1927 novel *Oil!*). As *The Master*'s Lancaster Dodd – loosely modelled by Anderson on the late Scientology guru L. Ron Hubbard – Philip Seymour Hoffman doesn't impersonate Welles. Yet there are trace elements in Dodd of Charles Foster Kane's arch humour and rhetoric, most noticeable when he's speechifying or playing to the gallery; and there are hints of Wellesian charlatanism in Dodd's lucrative pseudo-religion "The Cause".

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE DRUNKEN SAILOR
Traumatised US Navy veteran Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix) is taken up by guru Lancaster Dodd (Philip Seymour Hoffman)

It's a seductive proposition. Like Hubbard (pulp-fiction writer, screenwriter, failed naval commander, explorer, occultist and mystic), Dodd – who claims to be "writer, doctor, nuclear physicist, theoretical philosopher" – is a consummate self-inventor and self-publicist, as was Welles, the creator of works that harnessed charlatanism (*The War of the Worlds*, *F for Fake*) and characters who are liars (Kane the yellow journalist, Harry Lime, Falstaff). Additionally, *The Master* presents – no less hauntingly for not wreathing her in mystery – a human Rosebud, the tragic, self-inflicted loss of whom sets the theme of Freddie's benighted life. Like *Citizen Kane* (and *There Will Be Blood*), it aspires to the mythic evocation of an unknowable dispenser of the absolute power that corrupts. You have to ask yourself who else in Hollywood, aside from the Martin Scorsese of *The Aviator*, is attempting such resounding portraiture from American life?

In one of the film's many ambiguous scenes, Dodd entertains a house party held in his honour in 1950 by prancing in front of his adoring disciples like an especially lascivious faun. As he does so, he sings 'A Roving', the Elizabethan song (later shanty) first noted in Thomas Heywood's play *The Rape of Lucrece* and re-



 cast as a poem about sexual dissipation by Byron. Among those watching Dodd kick up his heels are Freddie, his acolyte and unofficial enforcer, and women ranging in age from 20 to 60 – among them Dodd's pregnant wife Peggy (Amy Adams) – who, following a cut, are revealed to be naked.

Although Dodd doesn't commit adultery in the film, the scene is evidently a fantasy about his power to attract pliant women though his authority and charisma. But who is the fantasiser? Is it Peggy, Dodd's enabler and Lady Macbeth? This would seem to be the case, since what follows is a one-sided conversation in a bathroom during which she tells her husband that he can do what he wants as long as neither she nor anybody she knows finds about it – allowing him to go a-roving – and then reasserts her proprietary hold over him by masturbating him over the wash basin. Or are the naked women imagined by Freddie, less a lover himself than an unrepentant sex addict? At the start of Dodd's performance there's a shot of Freddie sitting in a chair with his eyes so nearly closed that it's conceivable he is mentally undressing the women. If so, it's a fantasy of sexual inferiority, since these converts to Dodd's Cause are in thrall to "the Master", not to himself.

The 'author' of Dodd's priapic song and dance remains unclear. But its effect is to strengthen the sense that the Dodds have brought Freddie into the fold not only as damaged goods they can fix to show the efficacy of their therapeutic pseudo-religion, but also as a surrogate son they can bend to their will with fallacious promises of getting – in Peggy's words – whatever he wants in life (their actual son being 'normal' but no great devotee of their Cause). Freddie is to the Dodds what that other adopted son Eddie Adams/Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg, in a role Phoenix turned down) is to the equally destructive porn-industry couple played by Burt Reynolds and Julianne Moore in Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (1997).

The difference is that whereas in *Boogie Nights* Anderson offers a complex spin on an Oedipal triangle – Reynolds's director plying the hugely endowed Eddie to his porn-star wife – in *The Master* there's no sexual attraction between Freddie and Peggy. Instead there's a subliminal homoerotic one between Dodd and Freddie, as indicated when they jokily roll on a lawn in each other's arms following Freddie's release from jail. Confusing the issue is the Dodds' daughter Elizabeth (Ambyr Childers), who glances at Freddie during her shipboard wedding and later sneaks a hand onto his crotch during a Cause seminar. Freddie's drunken rages may be the ostensible reason why Peggy, Elizabeth and her husband Clark (Rami Malek) – a Dodd sycophant – try to oust him from The Cause, but it's his sexuality they fear: "He wants me," Elizabeth spitefully ventures. "I think he's in love with me."

Dodd insists on retaining Freddie, not only because Freddie sneaks him the volcanic moonshine he makes in chemistry sets, but because – as Hegel explained – the master depends on the slave for his existence. Unconsciously, Freddie rebels against his own slavishness. His violent outbursts and cravings for booze and sex (from which he is restrained during his tenure with Dodd) militate against the deadening effect of Dodd's unscientific therapy sessions and soul-destroying repetition exercises, which turn The Cause's subjects into happy, stupid drones. Freddie's frustrated Dionysianism clashes



with Dodd's Apollonianism in a mythical battle of wills that occasionally erupts but mostly simmers, the tension underpinned by Jonny Greenwood's swirling, lightly percussive modernist score, which sometimes sounds like an orchestra tuning up.

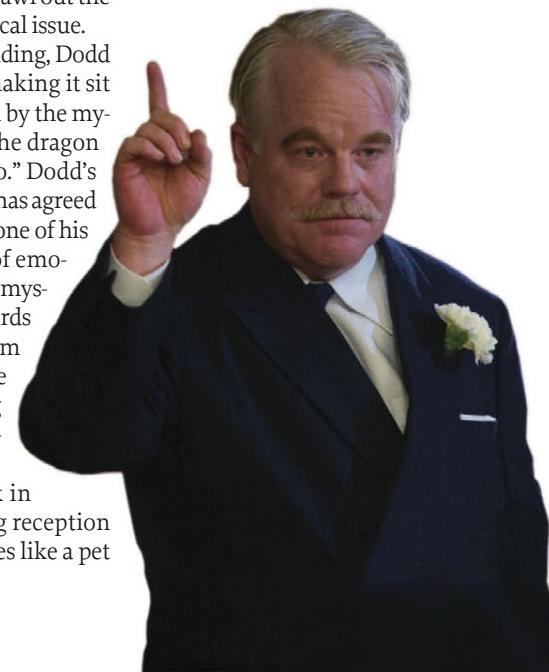
ELUDING EXPECTATIONS

Given the Welles connection, it's apposite that Anderson's sixth film is his most elusive. The expectations it raised in the American media – that it would be an exposé of Hubbard, his metaphysical science of Dianetics and the much vilified Church of Scientology that grew out of it in 1953 – were largely disappointed by the movie's lack of resemblance even to a veiled biopic. Although it draws on Hubbard and his third wife Mary Sue and their practices and lifestyle – with Dodd's book *The Split Saber* echoing Hubbard's *Excalibur*, and the credulous, gushing Cause sponsor Helen Sullivan (Laura Dern) invoking the early-1950s Scientology executive Helen O'Brien – the film isn't any more categorical than Dodd's personality. No less volatile than Freddie, Dodd can slip in seconds from paternal good cheer to ferocity, snarling "pig fuck" at a sceptic who questions The Cause's time-travel mumbo-jumbo and its avowed capacities to cure cancer and make the world safe from the Bomb, or bawl out the loyal Helen for mildly raising a methodological issue.

Speaking at his daughter's shipboard wedding, Dodd proselytises about lassoing a dragon and making it sit and stay on command. This may be inspired by the mythologist Joseph Campbell's notion that "the dragon is one's own binding of oneself to one's ego." Dodd's words trouble Freddie – the stowaway Dodd has agreed to hire, no matter that he's all id – and elicit one of his trademark nervous laughs, always a sign of emotional conflict, though he falls for the phony mystique and inclusive tone with which the words are spoken. It's Dodd's aura of fatherly wisdom and the excitement of participating for the first time in one of his informal processing sessions (reminiscent of scientology's "auditing") that snare Freddie in The Cause.

But what kind of evangelist would talk in metaphorical riddles at his child's wedding reception about dominating a dragon so that it behaves like a pet

Joaquin Phoenix's Freddie Quell is the most compelling casualty to appear in US cinema since Randle McMurphy and Travis Bickle



dog, whether they are abstracted from Campbell or from Hegel's master-slave dialectic? Perhaps the kind of man who senses that a weaker man, who's not without his attractions, is worth keeping around because he boosts the stronger man's ego. Beyond that, neither Anderson nor Hoffman in his performance lets on much. Dodd has no backstory. He is the film's great enigma, his mystery protected by the focus on Freddie—a stratagem that Hoffman apparently suggested to the writer-director.

RORSCHACH TEST

The Master starts in the dying days of World War II. Freddie is first seen on a beach in the Pacific sleeping beside the outsize breasts of an effigy of a woman his buddies have built in the sand (a similar shot at the film's close prompts an oneiric reading that may not bear analysis). In the same sequence, Freddie hacks coconuts from a palm tree and uses the milk in one of his cocktails (his ship's missile fuel comes in useful too), penetrates the sandcastle woman's 'vagina' and publicly masturbates into the sea. His high spirits are off-kilter, his sexual acting-out bizarre even for a sailor who may have been at sea for months. When he does a Rorschach test for a naval psychiatrist, he interprets the inkblots as genitals. Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, he fetches up in a military hospital where another psychiatrist questions him about a crying fit that Freddie says "was brought on by a letter from a girl I once knew", and which he laughingly dismisses as nostalgia. He has also reported experiencing a vision, but Anderson here leaves us guessing; not until the scene that precedes Freddie's muted climactic showdown with Dodd and Peggy is he seen having such a vision, a dab of aural magical realism reconnecting him with Dodd after he has broken away from The Cause.

Freddie's re-entry into the civilian world is a saga of maladjustment. Phoenix transforms him from a wiry seaman into a hunched weirdo. Hired as a department-store photographer of the kinds of middle-class families he'll never fit into, he uses his dark-room chemicals to make more cocktails, messes up a potential relationship with a sexually willing store model and fights with a pugnacious client. Downwardly mobile, he poisons an old migrant worker with his hooch on a Salinas cabbage farm – a touch of Steinbeck – and runs for his life. Lurching along a San Francisco quayside, he approaches Dodd's yacht – Anderson racking focus between the boat and Freddie several times to announce that this is his date with destiny. The next morning, when a pretty siren leads Freddie to Dodd from the cabin where he has slept, it's as if he's entering the labyrinth of his mind on a journey of self-discovery. Anderson uses psychological imagery again when Dodd and Freddie travel into a desert to dig up hidden (psychic) treasure: a strongbox containing the manuscript of *The Split Saber* – the title connotes the yin-yang nature of Freddie and Dodd's relationship, as well as Dodd's emasculation of his protégé.

What has driven Freddie to the verge of madness? Although Dodd's relentless questioning reveals the answers in a sustained processing scene, it becomes apparent that, as a quack, Dodd has none of the skills that a trained doctor would use to begin Freddie's healing. Freddie's troubles are easily explained by his father's death as an alcoholic, his psychotic mother's institutionalisation



in a lunatic asylum and his incestuous relationship with an aunt, while killing "Japs in war" is one source of his current trauma. Dodd also unearths the Rosebud – Doris (Madisen Beaty), the 16-year-old Norwegian immigrant from Freddie's Massachusetts hometown whom he deserted at the height of their love.

A competent psychotherapist would recognise the Freudian implications of Freddie's pattern of destruction. "Deserted" by his parents, cataclysmically in the case of his mother, he was bound to destroy the relationship with Doris by wilfully absenting himself from her, as he did for seven years, in the unconscious knowledge that he would be replaced by another man symbolising his father – a not uncommon Oedipal capitulation made by men who have not resolved castration anxieties during the phallic stage of sexual development. Dodd wrongly thinks that hammering Freddie with reminders of the loss of Doris (Clark is the bitchy instrument of this taunting) will clear him of his misery, though there's a strong element of sadism in this approach. Choosing 'flight' over 'fight', Freddie seizes his chance to speed away on a motorcycle, Anderson tracking with him as he tracked with him running from the vengeful migrant workers earlier in the film.

Tortured relationships between fathers and sons, or son surrogates, are a persistent theme in Anderson's work. That forged between the professional gambler (Philip Baker Hall) and the down-and-out (John C. Reilly) he makes his protégé in the Reno noir *Hard Eight* (aka *Sydney*, 1996) is prompted by the gambler's secret: that he killed the younger man's father. *Boogie Nights* has been discussed above. The misogyny of the self-help coach (Tom Cruise) in *Magnolia* (1999) stems from the dying father (Jason Robards Jr) he both loves and hates. Maledicted by the defection of his adopted son, Daniel Plainview transferentially batters to death the young preacher (Paul Dano) in *There Will Be Blood*.

Yet the sons survive the sins of the fathers. As Freddie slips from Dodd's grasp, Dodd promises to become his enemy should they meet again in another world. Freddie's typical response is to find a girl to have sex with – and to treat her to some giggly processing. Whether it's a sign of regression or a triumphant parody remains unclear, as does much else in this prodigious film.

TIES THAT BIND
Dodd and his wife Peggy (Amy Adams, above left) discover that Freddie is haunted by the memory of his lost teenage love Doris (Madisen Beaty, opposite left)

THE ANDERSON TAPES

Paul Thomas Anderson, right, on the sources of 'The Master' – from John Huston to L. Ron Hubbard – the technical challenges – from shooting on 65mm to evoking period through production design – and how he's found his own voice as a filmmaker

By James Bell

James Bell: Did you start out on 'The Master' with a desire to tell a story set in the immediate post-war period?

Paul Thomas Anderson: That's a good spot to start, but to be honest I couldn't possibly unravel back to what the initial idea was. When I started getting serious about making this film, it was really to try to make something tight and pulpy, kind of like a B movie – Jacques Tourneur, tough stuff. It wasn't that I wanted to make a retro film, but I can remember impulses like that. I don't know how much of that remains, but that was the starting place.

JB: There were a lot of traumatised people, like Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix), who needed to be reintegrated into society after World War II, and psychoanalysis and related ideas really spread and influenced the policy of the US government, which passed a Mental Health Act in 1946. Do you think those ideas then trickled down, and groups like the Scientologists emerged as a consequence?

PTA: Certainly Dianetics wasn't the only thing that was brewing around that time. You had all these ideas and groups cropping up at the exact same time, in America particularly. But a lot of it wasn't new at all, just dressed up in different clothes, with new jargon. It's hard to put your finger on why something takes hold in one place and not another, but then in those early days Dianetics and Scientology also took hold in England. But then at the same time there were guys like my dad who came back from the war and couldn't spend two seconds dealing with this stuff. They were strong, tough guys. To talk about your past or self-evaluate would have been sissy talk.

JB: You've cited John Huston's documentary 'Let There Be Light', which filmed World War II veterans being treated for nervous conditions, as a big influence. What did you take from it?

PTA: It's so great. I'd seen it years before, and it had obviously lodged deep in my memory bank. I was desperate to make some of the scenes I'd written in the VA [Veterans' Asso-



To make a film we have to be scared – prepared to go out and not know what we're doing

ciation] hospital sound a little better, because the ones I'd written weren't right. So I took dialogue and scenes wholesale from *Let There Be Light*. It's authentic and disturbing – certainly something you don't see in other films of the time. The War Department hired all these filmmakers to make films about the war effort, but they sat on that one for a long time [it remained unseen until 1980], and you can see why.

JB: In view of that, how closely did you base the characters of Freddie Quell and Lancaster Dodd (Philip Seymour Hoffman) on actual people? Was L. Ron Hubbard's life a starting point for the Dodd character?

PTA: Freddie was born out of really impulsive writing; he's a character who could do a lot of impulsive things that you may in fact like to do. In writing Freddie I would just think, "When was the last time he had a drink?" Or, "How much of a hangover is he dealing with?" Phil's character was a mix: taken from L. Ron Hubbard, yes, but also a figure like Orson Welles – that larger-than-life feeling. Somebody who has a lust for everything, and who only has two speeds: off and on, and on is really fast. Nothing's worth doing unless you're doing it fully.

JB: Did you have your two lead actors in mind while writing their characters?

PTA: Phil, yes. Joaquin kept popping into my head, but I'd been writing that character for so long that I had formed quite a flesh-and-blood person in my head before Joaquin was in. He didn't take much convincing to take the part, and he has in the past – I'd tried to get him in some things before that hadn't worked out.

JB: I understand that you showed Phoenix the 1955 Lionel Rogosin documentary 'On the Bowery' for reference in developing the Freddie character?

PTA: Yes, it's a great film. We've seen drunks on screen before, but this is something else: the shifts between sadness and hopefulness in the blink of an eye. And also physical stuff: there's not a lot of body fat on those guys – they're men probably 30 years old that look 50 or 60. It was also an influence in the way you're rooting for somebody who behaves destructively. It's like in a horror movie when you know someone is going to go through the door they shouldn't. You know in your bones that these guys are going to keep drinking, but it's still suspenseful in case one of them gets clean – but of course they keep reaching for the bottle. Heartbreaking.

JB: Amy Adams is a revelation as Peggy Dodd, the real intellectual power behind the throne. Was Mary Sue Hubbard (L. Ron Hubbard's third wife) a model for her character?

PTA: I actually don't think Peggy is a lot like Mary Sue Hubbard. There's an impression of Mary Sue Hubbard, who was really a force to be reckoned with. I took that portion of the idea, because that's good enough – this very



SKID ROW Lionel Rogosin's 'On the Bowery'

strong woman behind a strong man, who can sink into the wallpaper and stand dutifully by until the right moment. It was hard for Amy, because she spent so much time being basically a background extra following Phil around, but it's a slow burn and all pays off.

JB: Did you encourage improvisation?

PTA: There's a fair bit, sections are really improvised, but a lot of it is written.

JB: What about the scene on the boat when Dodd first asks Freddie the "processing" questions, and tells him to keep his eyes open and not blink as he responds?

PTA: That was written, though with little improvisations here and there. I'd written it until Freddie closes his eyes, and then the ac-

tors continue until the camera rolled out, with Philip [ie Dodd] asking him to describe feelings that he's having, things he's seeing and memories and smells. That was improvised. But the whole back-and-forth was written.

JB: How close are The Cause's processing questions to the auditing questions used in Dianetics?

PTA: Pretty close. I mixed up my own, based on things the script needed. Delicate changes. It's the luxury of fiction: steal what you need.

JB: Have you ever been audited yourself?

PTA: I have not. Have you?

JB: No. You worked again here with Jack Fisk, who was your production designer on 'There Will Be Blood', and has also worked with David Lynch and Terrence Malick. He captures a real feel for the period, but without obvious signposting.

PTA: Anybody can go shop for furniture, and look at enough colour photographs of the period that – with a good team around you – you can get the right wallpaper. But Jack always finds one thing that nobody else considers. I remember in *There Will Be Blood* he built the ladder down into the silver mine that Daniel has to climb down into at the beginning of the movie. I finally saw, after editing the movie for a year, that Jack had so carefully dug out alternating grooves on the ladder up – in other words, this is where my foot goes, this is where my hand goes, and it wears differently on the way up and the way down. It's those kind of details that nobody else would do that instantly put you in a real space, time and place.

We both have real radars for anything that's too much of an obvious signpost 



FREE ASSOCIATION A hospital scene in 'The Master', above, influenced by 'Let There Be Light', right



 for the period. When going to a location we'd always ask, "What's real? What really would have happened here?" Always asking those questions. But then the funny thing about working with Jack is, there's all this careful preparation and accuracy, and then on set he goes the other way, says: "None of that shit matters. Just do what feels right!" It's an odd combination that makes Jack Fisk Jack Fisk.

JB: What were the reasons you chose to shoot on 65mm film, which hadn't been used for a feature film since 1996?

PTA: We did a number of tests, and they just seemed right. It wasn't about getting a better resolution, because it wasn't that we were going for a greater clarity or an IMAX feeling. There was just something about it, when we looked at the characters in costume with their haircuts, that felt linked to what our impressions of the period are—which of course come mostly from period films. But it also stood on its own as something that was engaging the story. We stumbled into it, I have to say. We made the decision to stay with it as we were shooting.

It's great that a lot has been made of it, but on the other hand you get nervous, because people might enter the theatre expecting something particular. 65mm is usually used for widescreen, epic stories, and so to make more of a chamber piece and have so much made of it is nerve-wracking.

JB: Do you have a preference for how audiences should see the film? From a print or in a digital projection?

PTA: Without question the print. But that's like hippie talk at this point in time. It's not that I'm a Luddite – I'm open to new things, and I like using new gear. But I get bummed out when things are thrown out or sold for scrap metal. It's short-sighted. It's foolish to think you don't have to take care of a digital projector – they still have to be cleaned and maintained.

JB: Do you see your work as having changed since 'Magnolia' and 'Boogie Nights', which were compared to Scorsese and Altman? Do you feel you've found your own unique voice?

PTA: I hope that it's changed; I would hate to think I was doing the same thing I was doing when I started out. I've probably become more confident in my writing – more confident to challenge myself and the people I work with. To make a film we have to be scared – prepared to go out and not know what we're doing.

The Master could be a more enigmatic film [than the earlier ones]. A friend of mine said about Phil's character that he's the kind of person who must be so hard to get to know and it really rang a bell in my mind. It's not something I'd talked to Phil about – maybe he realised it – but there's always something just a little bit out of reach, and if he's ultimately the ringleader of this story, maybe it rings out through the film. It wasn't something we set



THE CAUSE Anderson's films, such as '*There Will Be Blood*', focus on surrogate father/son relationships

out to achieve; you have to trust that these things rise out of the characters and the story you're telling, rather than it being a filmmaking strategy.

JB: Do you do a lot of work shaping the film in the editing?

PTA: I don't think I shoot more now than I used to, except perhaps for my first film. We had it in doses on *The Master*. There were times when we had a location for a day, and that's it, and you are very disciplined. Usually it relates to what scene it is. The final scene, in the office in England, was incredibly disciplined and written out, and we filmed it in one night. But the scene where Joaquin walks back and forth between the wall and the window, for instance, that was freer. I wrote a bit of a scene, and then hoped something would develop. Hopefully over the course of a 60-day shoot you do mix it up. You can't just walk into the film throwing the plan out of the window and have it be a journey of arty discovery. I don't think that would work for me.

It's the same with the editing. Some scenes come together in an afternoon, because that's how they were shot, or they're written that way and they barely change. Other sequences are more a collection of a lot of moving parts and pieces that you're shaping with music. Those are great fun to do and keep you work-

You can't just walk into the film throwing the plan out of the window and have it be a journey of arty discovery. I don't think that would work for me

ing for a year. The others I'm no less proud of – they just work in a different way.

JB: There's an alertness to small gestures in the film, for instance when the Cause members arrive at the New York party and Freddie reaches out and touches the hostess's necklace. It sets the tone for the scene – you know immediately that this encounter is going to go badly. Was that written?

PTA: No, that was Joaquin. We set that shot up and knew basically what would happen. We shot it maybe 12 to 15 times over the course of two hours, and every time they walked in something different would happen. In scenes like that it's going to be different because there are multiple party guests. It's not just Phil, Joaquin and Amy sitting down talking in chairs – everybody is talking on top of one another; it's a much looser way of doing it. The frame might be set, but what happens within it will be different each time. Then you find one you like.

The impression shouldn't be that in searching we set the shot up and then, say, could be doing it for two or three days, to see what happens. There's a discipline within a bigger chunk of time that you set yourself. Sometimes you can work yourself down a bad rabbit hole, where you have something on the first take and you then stay too long, trying to do too much – ten takes later you've lost all confidence. You get to the editing room and look at what you've got, and usually the earlier ones are better. That's my experience, anyway.

 **'The Master'** is released in the UK on 2 November, and is reviewed on page 82. See our website for Kevin B. Lee's video essay on Paul Thomas Anderson's evolution as a director



THE JEZEBEL SWAGGER OF MIRIAM HOPKINS

The reissue on DVD of Ernst Lubitsch's brilliant 1932 comedy 'Trouble in Paradise' provides the perfect chance to sample the unique talents of its star, an actress whose verbal fireworks, unabashed sexuality and willingness to push the boundaries still fascinate 80 years on

By Dan Callahan

If she is known at all today, the controversial Miriam Hopkins is usually remembered as the troublemaking, diminutive blonde who made two films with her hated rival Bette Davis – *The Old Maid* (1939) and *Old Acquaintance* (1943) – and destroyed her own career because of her overbearing, attention-seeking behaviour. “Miriam used and, I must give her credit, knew every trick in the book,” Davis wrote in her autobiography *The Lonely Life*. “Once in a two-shot favoring both of us, her attempts to upstage me almost collapsed the couch we were both sitting on.” Even when she was making her best film, Ernst Lubitsch’s *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), and playing opposite a good friend, Kay Francis, Hopkins was still trying to hog the spotlight, making her co-star eat more than two dozen eggs before Lubitsch could get a take with Francis’s face fully visible for the camera.

Considering her work habits, it’s obvious why Hopkins’s best scenes are often based on pure hate between two people. Laurence Olivier gives the film performance of his life as George Hurstwood in William Wyler’s *Carrie* (1952), and there is no more electric confrontation on film than the scene where Hurstwood bursts in on his reclining wife Julia (Hopkins) in her boudoir and insists on getting his freedom. It lasts a little over a minute, and Olivier is like a caged beast stalking around the room, but Hopkins meets his energy, matches it and even at one point tops it when she verbally interrupts him. Wyler was one of the few directors who would cast the actress post-1943, feeling that whatever headaches she caused on set were worth it for what he got on screen.

Hopkins was born in Savannah, Georgia in 1902, and her Southern accent sometimes asserts itself on screen, so that words like “player” would become “play-yuh”, or “care” as “ca-yuh.” She went on the stage as a young girl and worked all through the 1920s on Broadway, leading a bohemian life and favouring the company of writers and

intellectuals. Hopkins eventually racked up four husbands, including director Anatole Litvak, all of whom she exhausted. As an older woman she didn’t like to talk about her career, but she gleefully spoke about her many lovers to anyone who would listen. “When I can’t sleep, I don’t count sheep, I count lovers,” Hopkins said. “And when I reach 38 or 39, I’m fast asleep.”

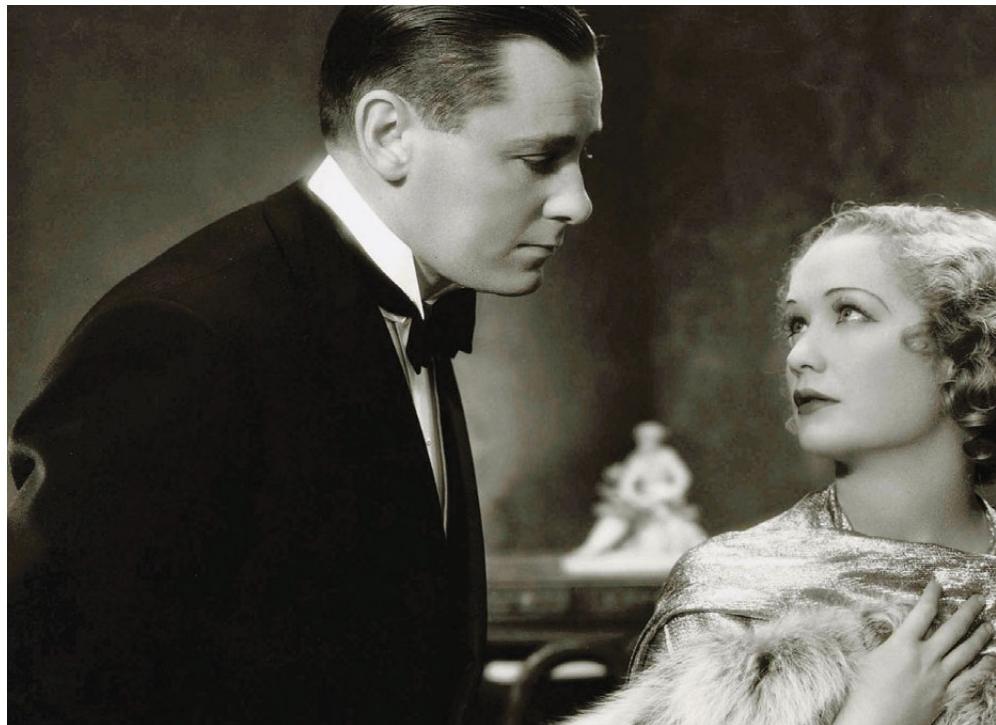
She signed with Paramount and made her first feature film *Fast and Loose* (1930) at their Astoria Studios in New York. In that debut, which boasts dialogue by Preston Sturges, Hopkins’s second line is, “Oh, shut up!” Her risky appeal in the film is based on a kind of triumphant obnoxiousness; she comes across like a spoiled, exhibitionistic child – always fluttering her little claw-like hands to hypnotise her audience – who has charmed everyone since birth and sees no reason not to constantly indulge herself. Time and again, in this first film and the films to come, Hopkins naturally falls into attitudes of disgust and disdain, opening her mouth as wide as she can so that it looks defiantly ugly. She gets her biggest laughs in *Fast and Loose* by acting as unsympathetic, selfish and bitchy as possible.

The following year, again at Astoria, Hopkins made *The Smiling Lieutenant*, her first of three films with Lubitsch, her ideal director. Lubitsch had performed in his own German silent films, and he was famous for acting out a scene himself before letting the actors do it for him. Most actresses would watch him and then adapt his style to make it lighter for themselves, but here Hopkins is obviously taking the rather heavy, grotesque movements and attitudes Lubitsch gave her to work with and making them even more grotesque, even weirder. Playing a dowdy princess with braids over her ears, she consistently makes this girl drippier and odder than might be expected, committing to goonish physical behaviour and executing it with knife-like precision.

GOLD DIGGER OF 1930
Miriam Hopkins in her first film, 1930's 'Fast and Loose', which established the bitchy, self-seeking persona she was to exploit so successfully in her finest films



KOBAL COLLECTION/6



Out in California, Hopkins tested for and won the part of Rosie, a nightclub singer, in Marion Gering's *24 Hours* (1931). The frizzy-haired, alarming Rosie is first seen almost yelling a song to her male customers, aggressively, even freakishly. This is a morbid woman, a drunk and a mess, speaking of "dead things" and striding around bra-less in a black-and-gold spangled dress. Hopkins's behaviour in *24 Hours* is spectacularly un-ladylike, unrefined and downright anti-social, and it seems like she feels a kinship with this lost, damned character. When a murderous lover breaks into Rosie's room, Hopkins suggests that this woman welcomes her own death. This little-seen film shows just how far Hopkins was willing to go in portraying uncomfortable feelings, and it remains one of the most disturbing performances she ever gave.

The same year Hopkins unleashed her insolent, sadomasochistic sexuality as Ivy Pearson in Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), briefly appearing topless under the covers in bed in her first scene with Fredric March's Doctor, before offering up her pliant, pale blondness to the sexual violence of Hyde. Though her cockney accent is hopeless, Hopkins manages to reach Ingmar Bergman-like levels of intensity in her scenes of hate with Hyde. But after that Paramount stuck her in three programme films before Lubitsch rescued her to be in his – and her – masterpiece, *Trouble in Paradise*.

In that perfect movie, Hopkins plays Lily, a libidinous fake in gold lamé who is most turned on by larceny. Lily's kleptomania is a sexy excuse for Hopkins's habitually overactive hands, and her Southern-belle volubility is harnessed to some of the best dialogue any actor ever had (courtesy of screenwriter Samson Raphaelson). Lubitsch allows Hopkins to do outlandish takes and inventively eccentric line readings as Lily flits and chatters away; only the prospect of sex and its afterglow slows this woman's racing motor down to a languid crawl.

This is a role that really highlights Hopkins's barbed

humour, especially when she says to her lover Gaston (Herbert Marshall), "I want you as a crook. I love you as a crook. I worship you as a crook! Steal, swindle, rob! Oh, but don't become one of those worthless, good-for-nothing gigolos!" Lily is amoral, but she has her own odd standards, and Hopkins is sophisticated enough to relish the joke of that and technically skilled enough to build this speech up with comic bursts of vocal hysteria while amply hinting at the sexual hunger underneath. In *Trouble in Paradise* – and all her best work – Hopkins is as far from being a heroine, or a 'nice' person, as you can get, and she reveals why in this film, beautifully handling the shift to drama when the seemingly heartless Lily is heartbroken over her lover's infidelity. Robbing a safe, Lily says, "This is all that's real: money, cash," and Hopkins harshly rasps out that word "cash" like she's setting it ablaze.

But even greater risk-taking was to come. In *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933), based on William Faulkner's novel *Sanctuary*, Hopkins offers one of the all-time best portrayals of masochistic female sexuality; only Claire Bloom in George Cukor's *The Chapman Report* (1962) even comes close to what Hopkins dares in this movie. She's more emotionally fluid here, vulnerable and unguarded, as a well-bred girl with a wild streak who delights in inspiring and then frustrating male lust until her life descends into a Patty Hearst-like sexual nightmare after being raped by the sadistic Trigger (Jack La Rue). After the rape Temple becomes practically catatonic, and Hopkins powerfully conveys this woman's debilitating sense of shame about her own sexual desires by upsettingly draining herself of all her usual nervous energy. She is travelling in very murky psychological waters here, and she handles this difficult role with the same kind of precision that marked her outré comedy playing for Lubitsch.

She acted a third time for Lubitsch in a free adaptation of Noël Coward's play *Design for Living* (1933), where she has a role that was close to the real Hopkins – an adventurous, critical girl who likes to loll about on couches in



CARNAL KNOWLEDGE
Clockwise from far left: 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'; 'Trouble in Paradise'; 'The Story of Temple Drake'. Below: 'The Smiling Lieutenant'; her first film for Ernst Lubitsch

inviting poses of sexual laziness while refusing to choose between two men she fancies, insisting instead on a *ménage à trois*. Yet again, she gets her biggest laughs in *Design for Living* when she projects arrogance, boredom or disdain, and she brings the same kind of prickly sexual charge to King Vidor's *The Stranger's Return* (1933). Working out her Paramount contract, Hopkins was at her strident, zesty best opposite Bing Crosby in *She Loves Me Not* (1934), where she dresses in male drag.

LAST HURRAH

In 1934, Hopkins signed with producer Samuel Goldwyn, which proved to be a mistake, but she had one final hurrah in Mamoulian's *Becky Sharp* (1935), an adaptation of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* that was the first three-strip Technicolor feature. Hopkins's star turn as a ferociously misanthropic social climber tears all sentiments to tatters. She was well cast (perhaps too well cast, according to detractors), and her relentlessly high-pressure performance is a love-it-or-hate-it proposition that can be seen as admirably single-minded or fearsomely one-note. In a late scene, Hopkins's Becky faces down a jeering audience by jeering right back at them, and this reflected the actress's own position at this turning point in her career.

Goldwyn tried to muzzle Hopkins into more ladylike roles, but this didn't work, least of all in Wyler's *These Three* (1936), a version of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* where the plot's lesbianism was changed to heterosexual dalliance, effectively neutering Hopkins's role of Martha Dobie so that she doesn't get to do the play's searing confession and suicide scene. Hopkins is perfectly capable in *These Three*, but it was perverse to choose her to do a study in repression when she's one of the least repressed actresses of all time.

Fourth-rate dud films began to accumulate for her, hard to see now and easy to forget once seen, but *Lady with Red Hair* (1940) at least features a tasty ham-acting contest between Hopkins and Claude Rains. She was reduced by her two film bouts with Davis, neither of which flatters her, particularly *Old Acquaintance*, where she does a kind of cruel Miriam Hopkins impersonation, all tiresome flounces, affected laughter, hysterical speeches and uncontrolled lifts of her eyebrows. Hopkins was too specialised and peculiar a performer to last for very long as a star in movies, especially after age began to coarsen her appearance and her acting style, and her own insecurities and ego made her too difficult to work with.

She went back to the stage, until Wyler gave her a plum character role as a merry widow in *The Heiress* (1949), letting her rise to the very different styles of Montgomery Clift and Ralph Richardson. After that film and *Carrie*, she was largely restricted to increasingly undisciplined TV and stage appearances before returning to *The Children's Hour* (1961) – again for Wyler, again thanklessly – this time in the part of the brutish aunt. Then came Arthur Penn's

The Chase (1965) where – as a mother fighting for her son – she screams and screams at Marlon Brando until it seems like she's really screaming just to make sure everyone notices she's still around.

Her last film was *Comeback* (1970), aka *Savage Intruder*,

aka *Hollywood Horror House*; under any title, it's the most outrageous of any of the 'grande dame guignol' films of the time that cast ageing actresses in slasher exploitation. Hopkins plays a faded star who watches old Miriam Hopkins films on TV and proclaims, "Isn't she marvellous?" At the age of 68, she has a hot love affair with a younger man and even appears in a brief semi-nude scene when he gives her a massage. Offered drugs, she quips, "The only trips I take are to Europe." As an elderly actress stuck in rock-bottom junk, Hopkins unsurprisingly still delights in rubbing our noses in gross, flamboyant, inappropriate behaviour – and that after all is her ultimate function on screen, and the key to her achievement in all her best pre-Code films between 1930 and 1934.

Hopkins died in 1972, a few months after attending a disastrous screening of *The Story of Temple Drake* at New York's Museum of Modern Art, where the audience laughed at the film. They were laughing, presumably,

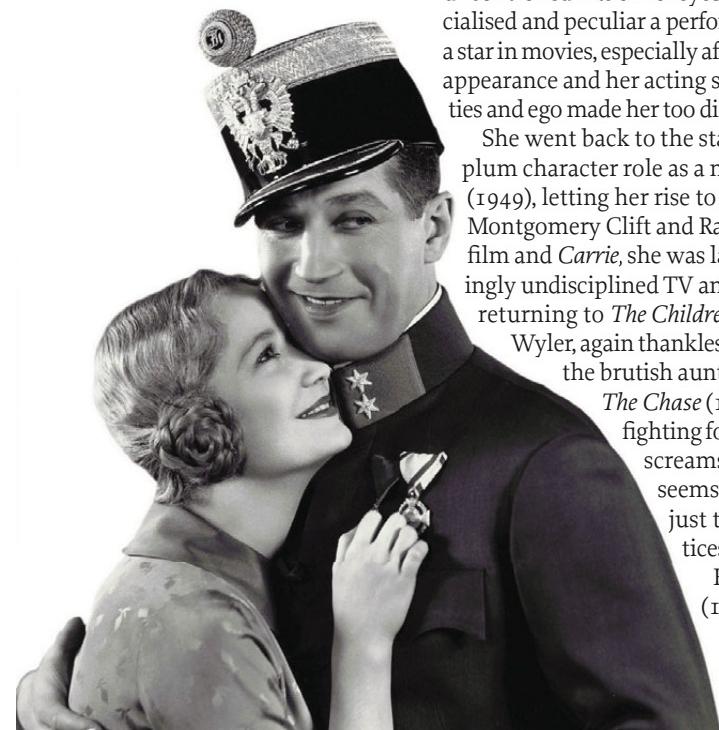
In 'Trouble in Paradise' Hopkins's Southern-belle volubility is harnessed to some of the best dialogue any actor ever had

because the sexuality she was portraying in that movie was so brazen, so thorny, so uncomfortable and unempowered and frightening. Hopkins was stung by their reaction, but she was a virtuoso of self-deception. Asked about it shortly afterwards by interviewer John Kobal, she defended the film vehemently, and bragged: "They show it often at the Museum of Modern Art."

Writer Allan Ellenberger has been working on a biography of Hopkins for several years now, and he has the participation of her adopted son Michael, who was told by Hopkins as a small child that the worst thing a man can be is a bad lover. When he asked what she did with a man who was a bad lover, Hopkins replied, "I kick him out of bed!" Inappropriate mothering? Perhaps. But Michael is reportedly still fond of his shameless mother, and whatever her on and offscreen peccadilloes, it's challenging but profitable to share his fondness. There are certain people who make life, and the movies, more colourful, and Miriam Hopkins is decidedly one of those people.

In 1940 she acted in Tennessee Williams's first produced play *Battle of Angels*, and she is like many of the playwright's female characters rolled into one: part Blanche DuBois, part Maggie the Cat, part Maxine Faulk – a Southern vixen who cannot shut up and cannot rest quietly. "Now here is a woman who could take my frequently over-written speeches and match them with an emotional opulence of her own," Williams wrote to his producer. Hopkins has never generated a cult, partly because some of her best films are hard to see and partly because her acting style and her deepest performing impulses are too unflattering, exasperating, bizarre and threatening for easy consumption. She is an acquired taste, but so offbeat at her best that she deserves wary tribute as a model of the excitement of uncapped negative energy and the sometimes liberating creative destructiveness of self-indulgence.

i 'Trouble in Paradise' is released on DVD in the UK in Eureka's Master of Cinema series on 12 November, and is reviewed on page 118



MURDER IN MIND

Seven years after his second feature 'The Death of Mr. Lazarescu' put Romanian cinema on the map, writer-director Cristi Puiu is back – this time as the star too of his even more uncompromising follow-up 'Aurora', about a man whose mid-life crisis turns murderous

By Nick James

There's no getting round it: Cristi Puiu's *Aurora* is a tough film to watch. At 181 minutes, this detailed observational study of 36 hours in the life of Viorel, a middle-aged man on the verge of awful crimes, requires an investment of concentration and watchfulness beyond the usual call of duty. But having admitted that, let me also assure you that its slow-build fascination makes it more than worth catching. If you do see it, the experience will reverberate in your mind for days.

Aurora is the second film in the putative series *Six Stories from the Outskirts of Bucharest*, which began with Puiu's groundbreaking *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (*Moartea Domnului Lazarescu*, 2005) – the film that could be said to have put Romanian cinema back on the map. I saw *Aurora* at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival and the interview with Puiu below was conducted during the BFI London Film Festival later that year. At Cannes, I had thought the film too long by 20 minutes or so, but by the time I talked to Puiu, I couldn't identify a single moment the film might easily lose.

The reason for the long wait for *Aurora*'s release must be partly down to anxiety about its saleability in the brutal current climate for arthouse films, so it's greatly to the credit of its UK distributors New Wave that they're bringing it out now. The most prominent of several things that make *Aurora* different from *Lazarescu* is the

fact that Puiu plays the lead role himself. Viorel seems at first to be on a mysterious mission to stalk complete strangers, while falling prey to the kind of frustrations that annoy men in the throes of mid-life crisis, but what makes the film so suspenseful it's the way it depicts these 'normal' reactions leading incrementally to more explosive expressions of feeling.

Puiu is not the only auteur director in recent years to have taken that lead-actor plunge: the 21st-century pioneer, in this context, was probably Nuri Bilge Ceylan in *Climates* (2006); another example was Kornél Mundruczó's *Tender Son: The Frankenstein Project* (2010). Puiu, a self-confessed shy and cerebral person, has his own deep reasons for taking on the role, as you will see. Somehow the knowledge that it's him on screen only adds to the excruciating tension in this most particular of films about the quotidian.

Nick James: Why did it have to be you in the lead role?

Cristi Puiu: I was not clever enough to decide to do this at the beginning, so I started casting and spent three months trying to find somebody. Clara Voda, who is in the film, asked me, "Why don't you do it yourself?" I said, "Don't be stupid. I am too shy." And I kept on searching, but started thinking about it. I decided to do some tests of myself and sent them to Marianne Slot [Lars von Trier's regular producer] and [director] Paweł Pawlikowski to get perspectives from people outside Romania. The problem was that, by the time I'd done the tests, I had already decided to play Viorel.

In the original script Gina [the character played in the film by Voda, who also plays the same role in *Lazarescu*], talking about somebody else, tells Viorel, "He told me we're living inside our heads and it is not enough to express ourselves in the correct grammar in order to understand each other." It was too explicit a line, so I cut it out, but it stayed in my mind. The idea that we cannot enter somebody's else's head was the trigger. [The French philosopher] Henri Laborit says that people run away from pain and search for pleasure as a means of doing their best to stay alive and to live a good life, and that's why we don't do extreme things. We inhibit our actions because we don't want to disappear, we



PERSONAL DEMONS

Director Cristi Puiu overcame his own inhibitions to take the central role of the homicidal Viorel in 'Aurora', both pictures





 I want to live our life. As the director I would have found myself inside a contradiction: entering the actor's head, and trying to direct it like a puppetmaster. So it had to be me.

The other reason has to do with the ethics of authorship. I was in a position to tell a story I'd never experienced about something I know nothing about. Who am I to tell such a story? During my research I met murderers. I went to a prison in Bucharest and talked with some. They killed people, they were dangerous criminals. It was a huge responsibility to assume the position of the storyteller. Research is very important, but being inside a crime changes your perspective. It is important to have the distance to judge and evaluate, but when you are inside, things are changing.

NJ: That's a dangerous thing for a director, because it means you'll want to play all the roles in every film from now on.

CP: More or less. But the same [need for veracity] was true about *Mr. Lazarescu*. I knew the film inside out. I grew up in a hospital because my father worked in hospital administration. We were a modest, poor family – my mother being a teacher on very small wages. They couldn't afford a babysitter, so the three of us – my sister and brother and I – spent time either in my father's office or in my mother's school. When I finished the *Lazarescu* script I vomited blood, [the result of] something called the Mallory-Weiss syndrome. A blood vessel breaks as the result of a shock. I was hospitalised and I put this in the film. Lazarescu vomits blood while his neighbour is telling him about Mallory-Weiss. I asked the doctor – I was pretty scared, he was chewing gum – "Is it serious?" "Yes, you're going to die." And he turned his back and left the room. He made a bad joke, inappropriate, but I was sure I was not going to die, so I was happy.

But when it comes to killing, I have no experience [to draw on]. I'm interested in killing because it's a consequence of imposing our philosophy on life. We are not flexible enough to make compromises or to listen to other people. We make an end by killing someone, or ourselves or by turning our back on a community and going somewhere else because living inside a community demands that you exchange points of view.

NJ: Are the other characters in 'Aurora' drawn from people familiar to you?

CP: [Most of] the characters come from my own milieu. In *Lazarescu* [for instance], my neighbour plays a nurse. There are characters from the fictional level of my brain, and there are others from my family life. [In *Aurora*], for example, Viorel's mother is a beautician, like my mother-in-law. During the filming, I kept in mind the fact that I'm not an actor. Becoming one led me to think of my father and his father. I asked myself serious questions about my youth and childhood. Research was going on in front of the camera. What makes me move like that? I realised I move that way when I am working. I used to be a painter and in the studio I noticed I was moving like a robot – or rather like my father moved when he was repairing the television. He was very serious about it, like a surgeon. So it was all to do with transforming a story I

I'm interested in killing because it's a consequence of imposing our philosophy on life. We are not flexible enough to make compromises

knew nothing about into something familiar.

NJ: You mentioned your own shyness, and shyness is one of the keys to Viorel. It's intrinsic to the way we experience the film.

CP: But it's a shyness that borders on autism. Some people say Viorel is autistic – I don't agree. If you take this extreme decision – to kill – you don't seek dialogue. You are on a completely different track. When I wrote the script I asked myself if Viorel had planned to kill four people. I didn't know. To make the script easier, I said yes, but during the filming I changed my mind. To say that he planned it is to know nothing about human beings. The dynamic of our existence is not so easy to decode. You have contradictory reactions all the time because your brain is searching for answers and if you find yourself in an extreme situation, it's hard to predict how you will react. So I said, "Yes, he wants to kill this notary because he thinks he's his wife's lover" – and then the act of killing changes him. It frees something inside him.

NJ: The great fascination of 'Aurora' is the way in which we read Viorel's mind shifting by slow degrees. His ability to seem to be both there and not there is very important.

CP: It was quite difficult because it was about myself. It was a schizophrenic experience.

NJ: How did that affect you as a director?

CP: It was the worst experience in my career. I've said this after every one of my three films. I made it worse by playing the lead role. Being in front of the camera was not a problem for me as myself, it was a problem for me as a director. I'd say to the actors, "Please learn your lines, because I can see you but I'm not behind the camera, so if I see that you're standing in the wrong place, I'll lose control and forget my lines." I said this calmly at first, but I ended up shouting a lot and I thought I might really kill someone.

I can never accept any lack of courage. Acting is going in, searching for yourself – everything else is bullshit. There are very precise things relating to the process that are different from one actor to the next. And I don't believe in these manuals, the Actors Studio etc. It's all speculation – though they're always clever enough to say that there are no magic formulas. Creating a character is not creating exactly, it is looking for yourself and being there. And when an actor gathers the point of being there, it doesn't matter what they are saying.

We [the audience] are so thirsty; it's the best position to be in – you're not directly involved, you can judge, evaluate, understand. But to be an actor – being there and watching yourself – nobody is in a perfect position to understand. Playing a criminal is not about trying to imagine how a criminal would be, it's about how you

would commit murder. This was why I was happy

to assume the mantle of Flaubert's famous quote about Madame Bovary, "C'est moi." There's also Pirandello's novel *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*, about a character who discovers one day that the way he thinks about himself, his secret self, is radically different from the personas that everyone who knows him have constructed for him. This was the question: who are we?

NJ: How did you prepare for performing in the film?



CP: It was not like letting myself be myself – it was looking for this very specific version of myself. During the casting I watched myself and I was gesturing way too much. It was revolting. When I first recorded my voice, I said, "This is not my voice." It's a good experience to go through because it has much to do with the act of perpetual translation. The director is translating and the actor is translating. I was shouting once at an actor and he said, "I understand." I said, "Please don't say that again – you understand nothing. Not because you can't understand but because explanations are no good. I do my best to explain and I know it's not clear. How can you understand when I know it's not clear?"

NJ: Despite appearances, this is a film full of humour. How do you bring comedy into something so grim?

CP: I started making films because certain films bothered me and I thought I could do better, and I don't know if I can. I was interested in things related to real life. I was against metaphorical films because the abuse of metaphor usually comes from people who think themselves very intelligent. There are others who play with metaphor with a sense of humour and I like that much more. Metaphor is getting old and it is not us [filmmakers] but the viewers who will build the new metaphors. They bring up things you never thought of. This is the act of communication, without which there is no sense in making films. I am trying to be as precise as possible, and humour is everywhere. If there is a God, then God has a sense of humour. Suppose that in a scene you're editing a character moves a glass from here to here and you find it very funny. This is the best thing that can happen!

NJ: Can you talk about your criteria for how long the film is?

CP: It was a five to six-hour film and I cut it to three hours. I edited step by step and – maybe it's banal, but during the process I was thinking in terms of music. When [Aurora actress] Luminita Gheorghiu came to see the edit, she was impressed by the timing and rhythm of the actions and she told me it was like music. I was very happy that I got some music out of the arbitrary. I like it when there are interactions that I didn't put there myself. For example, Viorel finds himself inside his car trying to eat a sandwich while things are happening outside. It's a sort of replica of a short film I made, *Cigarettes and Coffee* [2004], a response to Jarmusch's *Coffee and Cigarettes*. There are two people having a discussion at a restaurant table with a window behind it, but I didn't direct that, I let it happen. But I've forgotten the question.

NJ: We were talking about the length of things and how you were structuring the film according to music.

CP: Cutting out things I liked was proving difficult because I was interested in lots of different things. So I asked myself what the criteria should be. Something that stayed with me after *Lazarescu* was an English-language review in which somebody wrote that cinema has been hijacked by story. I find this to be true, especially in Romania, where literature is regarded as the queen of the arts. It's something I don't believe in. So my criteria were to stay inside cinema and get rid of all explanatory narratives, and while editing to think music and cinema. I don't know what cinema is – I was just trying to restore the facts, as in observational documentary. What does it mean to observe a character for 36 hours? There had to be things that didn't make sense but which are there

TERMINAL CASE

'The Death of Mr. Lazarescu', below, was an international breakthrough for Puiu, who plays the lead in 'Aurora', left



because we do things that are not important or spectacular. We assumed the risk that, in observing the daily routine, we could bore the audience. I tried to get rid of all the occurrences that are in cinema to make the audience feel at home. I did this out of respect for the idea that you cannot enter somebody's head. Viorel's trajectory is unpredictable. This film was a response to *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*. That title tells what's going to happen. In *Aurora* I try to play the card of suspense – of doubt about what happens next.

NJ: If this film is a reaction to the last and you're going to continue with the six-film series, in what way will the next one be a reaction to this?

CP: When I decided to play Viorel myself, I was pretty convinced I wouldn't speak to anyone. The script was very talky, so I got rid of a lot of dialogue. I knew that if I had to do such a serious thing [as kill someone], I would avoid any conversation because I'm fragile. I have doubts, and if others added their doubts, I would never go through with it. Maybe that's why I withdraw when I'm writing a script?

But the answer to your question is that I would like to really explore dialogue this time. We assume that through verbal expression we can get to the sense and meaning of it all. We keep on practising this even when there's no real dialogue. In thinking that the words cover the meaning we're faking it. I feel that what I'm saying is an approximation of my thoughts. It's not that my thoughts are all that profound, it's just that my ability to express myself is limited, like everyone else's.

NJ: But you still appear to be fascinated by the effort to communicate.

CP: Because I believe in meaning. I'm very optimistic. But I don't believe in the bullshit we encounter most of the time – especially from politicians. I want to restore dialogue in a very precise context, and maybe this will be the most Rohmerian film in this series that I am able to do. Maybe I will change my mind, but I find this idea very exciting.

i 'Aurora' is released in the UK on 9 November, and is reviewed on page 88

THE MAID REMADE

Voted the ninth greatest film of all time in *Sight & Sound's* recent poll, Dreyer's 'The Passion of Joan of Arc' can at last be seen as its maker intended, thanks to painstaking restoration and a miraculous discovery

By Michael Brooke

On 21 April 1928 Denmark's most luxurious cinema, the Palads Teatret in Copenhagen, held the world premiere of *Jeanne d'Arc's lidelse og død* (literally, 'Joan of Arc's Suffering and Death'), a film that, although technically French, was directed by local boy Carl Theodor Dreyer. It was greeted with respect by the critics, who were nonetheless concerned about whether the public would respond in kind (it clearly wasn't the sweeping historical epic suggested by the title) – and about the casting of stage legend Renée Falconetti as Jeanne and the (accurate) reports of the film's colossal 7 million franc budget.

The most perceptive review, by Ebbe Neergaard, recognised the film's qualities, but expressed a worry that the sometimes unbroken parade of extreme close-ups of Jeanne and her accusers would make extreme psychological demands on audiences accustomed to conventional film grammar. (Neergaard later wrote Dreyer's first biography, in which the director admitted that the close-ups "made it possible for me to bring the audience very near to the physical and mental torture that Jeanne suffered, [and also] showed how her judges and tormentors reacted to her tears".) Accordingly, the film had a very limited release over the next five weeks before being withdrawn. Censorship records suggest that only two prints were struck, on the volatile nitrate stock that was universal celluloid currency at the time.

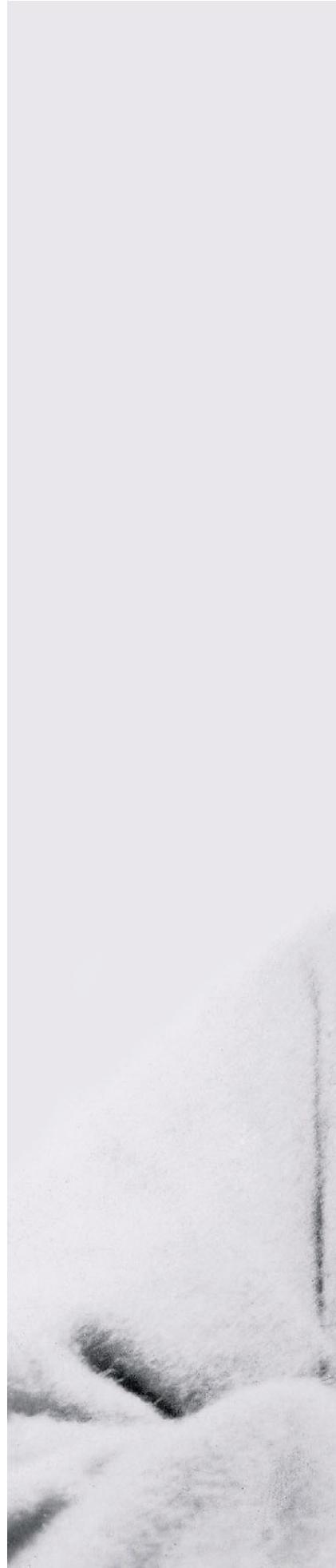
The film's official French premiere was then delayed from 1 May until 25 October, when it took place at the Salle Marivaux in Paris under the title *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. There were a number of reasons for the postponement. The film's backers, the Société Générale de Films, were worried that they might be faced with another financial disaster to follow Abel Gance's *Napoléon* the previous year. Since Dreyer's film had already been the target of right-wing protesters objecting to a foreigner telling the story of France's national heroine, it was privately shown to leading members of the Catholic clergy, including the Archbishop of Paris, who demanded changes. Government censors requested further cuts, and a musical score was commissioned from popular composers Léo Pouget and Victor Alix – against Dreyer's stipulation that the film be shown in silence. Dreyer strongly objected to these alterations, and sued the Société Générale, killing off a planned second collaboration.

Worse was to come. Less than two months after the Paris premiere, the film's cut camera negative was destroyed in a fire at the UFA laboratory in Berlin, with only a handful of prints in circulation. The rest of Dreyer's footage still survived, and so he and editor Marguerite Beaugé were able to assemble a substitute negative made from different, albeit often inferior, takes. Several additional prints were struck from this negative before the French laboratory used by the Société Générale was partly destroyed by fire in 1929; it was initially believed that this second negative had also perished. The film was kept in circulation in increasingly battered and bastardised form, but it was assumed that Dreyer's original version – and vision – was irretrievably lost.

In January 1952, the French writer Joseph-Marie Lo Duca announced that he had found a negative of the film in Gaumont's vaults in Paris. Was it Dreyer's original? Sadly not: it was the second negative, though at least its image quality and general integrity were superior to that preserved in surviving prints. Lo Duca prepared a version that controversially replaced intertitles with subtitles (thus interfering with the editing rhythms) and added a score based on existing recordings of familiar classical pieces by Albinoni, Bach and Vivaldi. This premiered at the Venice Film Festival on 12 September 1952, and was subsequently distributed by Gaumont. Dreyer strongly objected to Lo Duca's modifications, but this remained the version most widely available until the 1980s.

In the 1960s, Arne Krogh of the Danish Film Institute began a restoration of Dreyer's original version, or as near as it was possible to get to it based on surviving materials. For the next two decades, this was regarded as being closest to a definitive version, and might have remained in that position if it hadn't been for a genuinely sensational discovery in 1981. Although the two original Danish prints from 1928 had been regarded as missing presumed destroyed, one of them turned up at the Kilemark Sykehus mental hospital in Norway, having been obtained by consultant physician and ardent Francophile Dr Harald Arnesen. Arnesen had died in 1953, and there was no paper trail clarifying how he got hold of the print (aside from a postmark confirming shipment in 1928), but there it was: the version that played at the film's world premiere, with Dreyer's original

THE POWER OF THE IMAGE
Widely seen in a version composed of outtakes, Falconetti's performance has still captivated audiences







The director admitted that the close-ups "made it possible for me to bring the audience very near to the physical and mental torture Jeanne suffered"

DRAMATIC INTENSITY
Left: the writer Antonin Artaud, bare-headed, as Massieu in 'The Passion of Joan of Arc'; right: Dreyer, in light-coloured hat, on the set

Danish intertitles, struck from the vanished first negative, complete with the shots subsequently censored in France (which include a startlingly graphic bloodletting, carried out for real on the set; the second take was much more anaemic).

The Oslo print was duplicated and its intertitles translated into French, and the result was understandably regarded as the *version définitive* when it was publicly premiered in the mid-1980s and widely screened thereafter. Similar acclaim greeted Criterion's 1999 DVD, sourced from that version and accompanied by Richard Einhorn's specially written choral piece 'Voices of Light' and extensive extras that included a side-by-side demonstration of the different takes used by the Oslo print and the Lo Duca edition. The resulting package was frequently cited as a model of DVD curatorship, despite some criticisms from scholars about the authenticity of its French intertitles and the historical accuracy of its playback speed.

In 2004, Eureka's Masters of Cinema sub-label began its first year with a Dreyer title (*Michael*); four years later it released a lavish edition of *Vampyr* in collaboration with Criterion. After years of patiently waiting for the unexploited UK rights to *The Passion of Joan of Arc* to become available again, Masters of Cinema was finally able to secure the film in late 2011. Securing mastering materials good enough for a Blu-ray release now became a priority. Gaumont had talked about doing a full-scale restoration as a major cultural project funded by the French government, but there was no definite timetable, and when Nicolas Sarkozy lost the presidential election, plans were apparently kicked into the long grass and have only just been resurrected.

However, the Oslo print had ended up at the Danish Film Institute, which was willing to let it be borrowed, happy that Masters of Cinema was as keen as they were to preserve Dreyer's original intertitles and present the film at their preferred projection speed of 20 frames per second (the Criterion DVD and many theatrical screenings were at 24fps). After the print was scanned at 2K resolution, the image was given a digital clean-up, working frame by frame to remove dirt, scratches and debris and stabilise the image. Restoration producer James White's priority was to preserve the film's integrity; if the processing threatened to introduce unwanted elec-



tronic glitches on certain frames, it was reduced or not used at all. The Oslo print turned out to be far from the near-perfect condition of legend, though it was in very good shape considering its advanced age.

A further problem then arose. Although Dreyer preferred the film to be shown in silence (the default playback option on the new discs), the Masters of Cinema release nonetheless required an optional musical accompaniment for commercial reasons. But playing the film at 20fps stretched the running time from 82 to 96 minutes, so no existing music recording (such as 'Voices of Light') would fit. Fortunately there was an existing Japanese DVD release, also at 20fps, whose Mie Yamashita piano accompaniment Masters of Cinema was able to license. The 24fps version is also being included, with a soundtrack by experimental guitarist Loren Connors. As an aid to film scholars, Masters of Cinema is also including the Lo Duca version (although the Blu-ray menu warns that it was "disowned by Dreyer and generally considered a butchering of his artistic vision") and a 100-page book that combines archive material by, among others, Antonin Artaud (the film's co-star), Luis Buñuel and Dreyer himself, alongside a detailed comparison of the two negatives by Dreyer specialist Casper Tybjerg.

This is, of course, not the end of the story. If the Gaumont restoration goes ahead, it will undoubtedly be more extensive – ideally, the film needs a full photochemical restoration and the creation of a 4K digital master. Criterion may release its own Blu-ray in the US (the Masters of Cinema discs are contractually region-locked), and will make their own presentational decisions. Ironically, given the film's nationality and viewing history, the Masters of Cinema edition doesn't include a French-language viewing option other than the Lo Duca version, so that's an immediate gap in the Blu-ray market.

It may be that posterity will regard the Masters of Cinema edition as the scholarly one, primarily intended for students of film history. For now, however, it's not just the best but the only way of easily seeing the film that Dreyer originally signed off – and which was once thought to have suffered the fate of its tragic heroine twice over.

i **The restored version of 'The Passion of Joan of Arc' is released on Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on 19 November**

THE FACE OF ANOTHER

Few films in the history of cinema have used close-ups of the human face as intensely and overwhelmingly as 'The Passion of Joan of Arc'. But what else can we learn from close-ups in the movies, and the different ways in which they impact upon us?

By Mark Cousins



1

Gina Manès in 'Cœur fidèle', above

Asked to write about facial close-ups in movies, I start to think of the great ones, and try to do so in the order in which they occur in film history. But that seems to distance and regiment them. Faces loom out from the movies in ahistoric ways. Film close-ups are in your face. Think of them and you can smell their whisky breath. They're intoxicated cinema, the rush of the z axis. So I'll write about them as they come to me – as a "thousand coloured pictures to the eye", to use Robert Louis Stevenson's nice phrase – and see what, in doing so, I can discover about them.

The very first close-up that comes to mind is this one. She is Gina Manès; the film is Jean Epstein's *Cœur fidèle* (1923). Manès plays Marie, orphaned in her childhood, menaced by men, suspicious of life. The sharpness of her look, her eyebrows, the light in her eyes, the focus on her face (we can see the texture of the make-up) make it seem that she'll pierce the screen. Perhaps it's this sharpness that makes her first in line in my memory of facial close-ups. Her image grabs me, grabs the future, like bullies grab.

So maybe this if my first point: cinema close-ups grab like bullies grab. They use their luminous, grand advantage unfairly, almost. With the exception of colossal ancient sculptures like the Sphinx, or a more modern one like Mount Rushmore, human beings have seldom had the chance to inspect magnified faces. The result is a kind of sublime. And – as with all sublimes – mixed in with the awe is fear.

2

Simon Srebnik in 'Shoah', below

Talking of fear, the next face that comes to my mind is this one, from Claude Lanzmann's Holocaust documentary *Shoah* (1985). Srebnik was one of two survivors of the Nazi death camp Chelmno. We look into his face as we hear that he rowed human bones from Chelmno, down a river, and sang Prussian songs to the Nazis. I write 'into' his face, but is that right? Should I say 'onto' rather than into? We see his hooded left eye and his stare into the distance and we know that he is remembering, that there's a machine whirring behind his eyes, and we realise that for all the magic of the movies – and no matter how much we stare at this face or that of Ingrid Bergman/Ilsa in *Casablanca*, and despite what Norma Desmond says in *Sunset Blvd* – we will not see the machine itself. We see only the surface, the thing that's left: the pyramid, not the vast ramp of thought and feeling that built it.



Softness of shadow and shallowness of focus take the face out of the realm of individualism and specifics into something more generalised: the idea of a face



3

Alexei Kravchenko in 'Come and See', above

This is 14-year-old Alexei Kravchenko as Florya in Elem Klimov's World War II film *Come and See* (*Idi i smotri*, 1985), about a boy's awful journey through Nazi-occupied Belarus. Florya has been prematurely aged and blistered by the iniquities that have entered those eyes. We often say that we are drawn in by eyes, that they are entry points, but here, surely, they are exit points from which the toxic horrors that have hit Florya's retinas bounce back out again, rejected in the same way his stomach would reject poison. Florya is Srebnik, in a way – the young man seeing atrocity, the old man remembering it. You could superimpose his close-up on Srebnik's, just as a skull is superimposed on Norman Bates's close-up at the end of *Psycho*.



4

Greta Garbo in 'Queen Christina', above

Perhaps it was strange to start with the bullying, pain and inscrutability of movie faces rather than their joy and beauty, but pain has to come somewhere, so why not at the start? To switch to close-up pleasure, I read Roland Barthes's essay on Garbo's face. He talks mostly about *Queen Christina* (1934) and this shot from the end of the film. But his essay is wendily about her face as an object, a mask, a myth. I read it and learn nothing.

What do I see in this inexpressive face? The arch of the right eyebrow, the lack of light in the right eye. A director – Rouben Mamoulian – determined to go against the theatricality and histrionics of conventional film acting, who instructs his actress to be a mask, to go to sleep inside. An intelligent Swede drawing on the emotional minimalism and realism of her own culture. A Hollywood lighting tradition (the DP was William H. Daniels) in which softness of shadow and shallowness of focus – the opposite of the sharpness of *Coeur fidèle* – take the face out of the realm of individualism and specifics, into something more generalised: an idea of a face – which is what Barthes says, so I was wrong about his essay.

5

Buster Keaton in 'Sherlock Jr', below

As with Garbo, the human being behind this face seems asleep. In this image from *Sherlock Jr* (1924), Buster Keaton's eyes are as beautiful as Garbo's, but more languid and sharper – closer to those of Gina Manès. Stare into them and you blink first. Their intensity unnerves me. So how can such intensity be funny? All comedians are square pegs, ill fitted to the world in which they live. Stan and Ollie are more childlike than the world, Jerry Lewis more fidgety. Houses fall around Keaton and trains collide, but he has no flight mechanism. His nervous system and his face-mask register none of these disturbances. He's oblivious and yet coping, and we see this on his face.



6

'Ten Minutes Older', below

In the first five images, have we discovered much about faces and films? I decide to tweet about the fact that I'm writing about close-ups. What type of images might come to Twitter's cinephile eye? Within seconds, replies come in. Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (left) is mentioned, of course, but Kiarostami's *Shirin* (2008, bottom left) is suggested most. It's a great choice. In the film, 114 women watch a film. We see their reactions, not the film itself. Very Kiarostami, very much about what is absent.

I start to write about Kiarostami's film, but suddenly my mind brings up this film instead: Herz Frank's Latvian movie *Ten Minutes Older* (*Par desmit minutem vecaks*, 1978), shot by Juris Podnieks, himself later a great director of documentaries. If you haven't seen it, please do. (Now, if possible. It's online.) In its single ten-minute shot, the camera moves in to this boy, who's watching a puppet show. Look at his face: it's the opposite of Keaton's. Lit from below, by the limelight, he gasps and his eyes are about to fill with tears. He's unguarded, scared, compelled by the thing that is upsetting him, whatever it is. He's too young to be able to apprehend the fact that life will be full of such fears and shocks.

Maybe he's Florya from *Come and See* before he has seen too much. Maybe he's Simon Srebnik from *Shoah*. Maybe he's Garbo's *Queen Christina* before she has learned to mask her feelings. Set his face against Garbo's and you see the whole of life: the terror at the first time life hurts turns into the blankness of expression that comes from having felt so much. Is this boy you? How could you answer other than yes? That's the thing about close-ups: they're always about you.





7

DeVeren Bookwalter in 'Blow Job', above

Someone tweets that the best facial close-ups are Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*. Immediately I think of this film: *Blow Job* (1964). For 35 quite boring minutes we look at this close-up of the face of DeVeren Bookwalter as (we presume from the film's title) he receives oral sex. He's lit from above – Dietrich-style north lighting – and we see a collar of a leather jacket, which suggests a Brando-y biker guy. But as we watch, we admit that this film makes explicit what is implicit in many other films: to look at a close face is often an erotic act. We see in a face, at times, the hint or promise of – or metonym for – that person's genitals.

Part of the pleasure of the close-up of a human face is that it stands for other things about the person too. Its refusal to be literal, its occlusion, allows us to see in it their sadness and joy, their assertiveness and shyness, their hubris and depression – and their sex. Metonym comes from the Greek for 'change of name'. The movie-close up is a change of name.



8

Issiaka Kane in 'Yeelen', above

This image is from one of the greatest of all African films, Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* (*Brightness*, 1987). As you can see, it's a mix of two faces. The human one belongs to a young man, Nianankoro (Issiaka Kane), who has trekked across plains and grasslands in an Oedipal quest to find his father. This is the very moment he does so. Cissé and his DP Jean-Noël Ferragut film Nianankoro's face as closely as Sergio Leone frames his men in shootouts – where the stare becomes the desire to kill, the aim. But then Cissé has the face of a lion overlaid on the man's face – we see it in this image. In the cosmology of this remarkable film, people can easily become animals. What was implicit in the Warhol face becomes explicit here. Faces rename – they become something else.

As we watch, 'Blow Job' makes explicit what is implicit in many other films: to look at a close face is often an erotic act



9

Anna Karina in 'Vivre sa vie', above

Maybe the real clue to why facial close-ups are fascinating is this: they seem to show the mechanism of thought, but don't. They seem to show pain, but don't. They seem to show sex, but don't. So maybe this image from the beginning of Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962) is the *real* facial close-up. We see the back of the head of Anna Karina and are desperate to see the front – what Hollywood calls 'want-see'. We glimpse her face in the mirror and she seems to be talking or even laughing. But we're not sure.

In films like *Don't Look Now* and *Psycho*, we see the back of a head that seems benign, but then it turns and we see a shocking face. Partial seeing, seeing behind, hurt seeing, metonymic seeing, comic seeing, multiple seeing, dreaded seeing – this is the kind of seeing we experience when we see a facial close-up in the movies.





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DEAD RINGERS

Like his breakthrough film 'Dogtooth', director Yorgos Lanthimos's follow-up 'Alps' uses a stylised exploration of human hierarchies and the unreliability of language to cast light on the state of Greek society

By Olga Kourelou

The title 'Alps' ('Alpis') refers to the name of the small clandestine organisation in Yorgos Lanthimos's film that offers the recently bereaved the opportunity to hire individuals to stand in for their deceased loved ones as a way of dealing with their loss. Unnamed during the film, and defined solely by the function they perform, the Alps team members are a Gymnast (French actress Ariane Labed), her Coach (Johnny Vekris), a Nurse (Aggeliki Papoulia) – also known by her alpine alias, Monte Rosa – and a Paramedic (Aris Servetalis) who, as leader of the group, calls himself Mont Blanc.

The film opens in a sports hall where Carl Orff's famous choral piece 'O Fortuna' (from *Carmina Burana*) is being played full blast. The Gymnast performs a ribbon routine for her Coach, after which, seemingly dissatisfied, she confronts him with the question, "Why can't we use a pop song?" He responds with an equally



LET THERE BE LIGHT
In 'Alps' by Yorgos Lanthimos, below, it is the Nurse (Aggeliki Papoulia, above) who challenges the organisation's strict gender roles



baffling answer: "You're not ready for pop." The oddity of this exchange – accentuated as it is by the actors' alienating deadpan delivery – is, however, the kind of thing we expect from a film by Lanthimos. For the Greek filmmaker who established his reputation with *Kinetta* (2005) and *Dogtooth* (*Kynodontas*, 2009), the absurdity of human activity and the unreliability of language are central concerns. In *Alps* it is precisely this exchange that offers a point of entry into his most opaque film to date.

According to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, pop culture is based on a deep-rooted desire for collective emotional participation. Below the glacial surface of the players in *Alps*, there's a pining to participate. If *Dogtooth* is about escaping the tyranny of groups, *Alps* is its reverse. Thus the deaths of loved ones become a pretext to explore not only the bereaved's drama of loss and grief, but rather the drama of (not) belonging.

'Alps' focuses on the female characters, showing the pressure they're under to fulfil only those roles that patriarchal Greek culture deems acceptable

As in his earlier films, Lanthimos treats identity here as a matter of imitation. The Alps members derive their sense of self and their connection to the world through images of American pop culture. When the Paramedic 'interviews' a seriously injured teenage tennis player – a case the Alps may soon have to substitute for – he asks her who her favourite actor is. This is a valid question, because how can one of the Alps 'become' her without knowing her role model? Thus the film explores the idea that, rather than the extension of an essential core, a person's identity is conditional on a mediated image. Later in the film, when the Nurse stands in as a blind woman's best friend, she reads out a Winona Ryder interview from a magazine. Any intimacy between them is achieved through this evocation of the star's manufactured public persona. The pervasiveness of these fictionalised identities is made even more apparent during the Alps team meetings, where they impersonate famous dead people. Is this simply part of their training, or is it essential for them to exist under assumed identities in order to participate with others? Everything points to the latter.

Social acceptance in *Alps* has marked gender implications. The film focuses on the female characters, showing the pressure they're under to fulfil only those roles that patriarchal Greek culture deems acceptable: the traditional roles of child-woman and carer. The Gymnast is the typical infantilised young woman licked into shape by an authoritarian male figure. Her malleability – suggested through her pliable body and her childlike, accented speech – is confirmed by the rigorous training she undergoes and the strict punishment she receives. In one of the film's most uncomfortable scenes, she hangs upside-down from the sports-hall ceiling, repeating a phrase she failed to memorise and enunciate properly. This rote learning eventually pays off, since, by conforming, she seems to get what she wants.

This is not the case for the Nurse, however. Her nurturer role ends up being a bad fit. Though determined to play the dutiful daughter and the devoted partner/colleague/friend, she is not as unselfish as the part requires her to be. Her need to be someone's 'favourite' and to belong in a relationship, however artificial, is so urgent that she'll bend any rule. For this she is punished: she gets her face slapped, is excluded from the group, expelled from

the family and beaten over the head with a club. Here the film seems prescient about the violence against women inherent within current Greek society. In June, a spokesman for Greece's far-right party Golden Dawn slapped the face of a female communist MP. Many condoned the violence because it was directed at a woman who not only has dissident views but also a dissident sexuality.

Despite its bleak view of women's limited choices, *Alps* does depict women challenging the rules. The Gymnast's request for pop music ridicules the banal classicism the Coach stands for through his association with 'O Fortuna', a piece that has come to represent clichéd corporate pomp as a result of its overuse in sports events, film and TV. It's even been used in commercials for Pasok, Greece's ruling party until this year's elections. Indeed, Orff's music can't escape being read by Greek audiences as a disguised jibe at the party currently held responsible for Greece's ossified political establishment. Nonetheless, the Gymnast's attempt to challenge the authority of the Coach seems futile. We see his immovable, stocky figure towering over her tiny frame as he mutters threats.

But if the Gymnast can be moulded into conformity, the Nurse will not. Her refusal to follow convention is enhanced by the angularity of actress Aggeliki Papoulia. The Nurse doesn't want merely to 'be' someone; she wants to play and dance, and to make a connection with someone else. For this, she is willing to act out of character – to stop playing the selfless carer and laugh at the poorly scripted lines she has to perform.

In many respects, the making of *Alps* itself resembles its female lead's determination to do things her way. Despite the remarkable critical success of his previous film *Dogtooth*, Lanthimos found it hard to get funding for his follow-up project. As the director has revealed in several interviews, *Alps* was made on a restricted budget with limited technical means. It lacked any form of state support until it won the Golden Osella award for best screenplay at the 2011 Venice Film Festival. Of course, the conditions under which *Alps* was made point to the realities of filmmaking in Greece for everyone – conditions now exacerbated by the financial crisis.

The Greek state's seemingly cynical attitude towards *Alps* is just the most recent example of its traditional neglect of film culture. But the limitations imposed on the making of the film align it with other examples of what the film scholar Mette Hjort calls "small nation" or "minor" cinema. According to Hjort, the adjective "small" acknowledges that in order to gain access to the game of film production, filmmakers have to reconfigure the rules that hinder their entry into the networks of cultural circulation. This is precisely what Lanthimos achieves with *Alps*. Adopting a can-do attitude and skilfully employing the aesthetic choices his limited budget puts at his disposal (the film is shot brilliantly on a digital camera), Lanthimos engages in a politics of recognition, making his films – and by extension Greek cinema – belong to the wider cinematic community.

Alps ends where it begins, in the sports hall. The Gymnast now performs a different choreography to a different song: 'Popcorn'. With the Gymnast and the Coach smiling at each other, the film registers a shared emotion for the first time. Yet as soon as we feel we are invited to join in too – just as we're also ready for pop – we're confronted by the repetition of the Gymnast's line: "You're the best coach in the world."

 See the S&S website for a video interview with Yorgos Lanthimos. 'Alps' is released in the UK on 9 November, and is reviewed on page 86

MICHAEL HANEKE

Over the past two decades, films such as *Funny Games*, *The Piano Teacher*, *Hidden* and *The White Ribbon* have harvested awards while giving the Austrian writer-director Michael Haneke a reputation – whether deserved or not – as a cool observer of human cruelty, weakness and perversity. But his new film *Amour* is something else. A portrait of a French couple in their eighties, preparing for the end after the wife suffers a stroke, it is – Haneke acknowledges – his most personal and emotional film to date. It also won the director his second Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival. **By Geoff Andrew**

Geoff Andrew: When we spoke about 'The White Ribbon' ('Das weisse Band') in 2009, you were writing a film about old age, but you later put it aside because of another film on the subject. So is 'Amour' ('Love') different from what you had in mind then?

Michael Haneke: Not really. To be honest, I had writer's block, and when [producer] Margaret Ménégoz told me one of her colleagues had seen a film on the same topic at a festival, I took that as an excuse to start work on something else. But as soon as I did that, the solution to my problem with the first script came to me! Also, it turned out that the film Margaret had told me about was very different from mine. There are many films about illness and dying, especially on TV, but most deal with the social aspects – the family, the hospital – and the physical suffering. Whereas to me what was interesting was how we cope with the suffering of someone we love very deeply. I could've made a film about a couple in their forties with a child who dies of cancer. It would be the same theme, but that would be more of a special case; fortunately, it doesn't happen to everyone. Whereas old age and the illnesses that accompany it touch nearly everybody in one way or another. At some point even people who've always been fit and well get worn out and die; sadly, that's inevitable.

GA: Did you do much research into the medical aspects of the story?

MH: Not a lot. I did some research before writing the script to make sure I wouldn't make mistakes, and I came across things I didn't know. I spoke with doctors, visited hospitals and attended therapy sessions. The scene where Georges sings to Anne, for instance, comes from a speech-therapy session I witnessed; I found that very touching.

GA: You always wanted Jean-Louis Trintignant to play Georges. He doesn't act much now; what if he'd said no?

MH: I probably wouldn't have made the film. I don't know any other actor who radiates that warmth he has, and the film needed that.

GA: You originally had Annie Girardot in mind to play Anne.

MH: Had Annie still been alive and able to play the part, I might have cast her, but with hindsight I'm far from sure she'd have been better. In fact, I think Emmanuelle [Riva] was perhaps better for the role. It's not that she's a better actress; she and Jean-Louis are just so believable as a couple. It really feels like they've spent so much time together and shared a lot.

GA: Did you give the actors much direction?

MH: No. I don't really like discussing the film too much with actors, nor do I do a lot of rehearsals. Before shooting starts, we'll go out for a meal and discuss all sorts of things, but I don't like talking very specifically about the film or the roles. Generally I've found that most good actors don't much like that either. I just give very simple instructions – sit down, pick up a glass, look at your watch, or whatever – and it's rare that an actor asks about the character's motivation for looking at their watch. You just need to make sure you get the casting right. That's not only about finding good actors, but about finding the right actor for the part; put a good actor in the wrong part and the result can be disastrous.

GA: To play the daughter's British partner, you chose William Shimell, the opera singer cast by Abbas Kiarostami in 'Certified Copy'. How did that come about?

MH: By chance I saw William perform in the Aix-en-Provence production of *Così fan tutte*, directed by Kiarostami five years ago. He was fantastic, and I thought I must use

him. Since then, he was in Kiarostami's film; he was great in it. He only has a small part, with a few lines, in my film, but I really enjoyed working with him. He's a very interesting actor and a very funny man.

By the way, as it happens my own next project is directing *Così fan tutte*, in Madrid and Belgium.

GA: Why did you make Georges and Anne former music teachers?

MH: It's a world I know; my stepfather was a composer. And it allowed me to use music in an interesting way. Music represents the possibility, at least, of consolation. Before we finalised the film's title, one we were considering was *La Musique s'arrête* (*The Music Stopped*). Whenever there's music in the film, it's interrupted.

GA: You often use music very expressively as content or commentary. But do you also use it to shape your films?

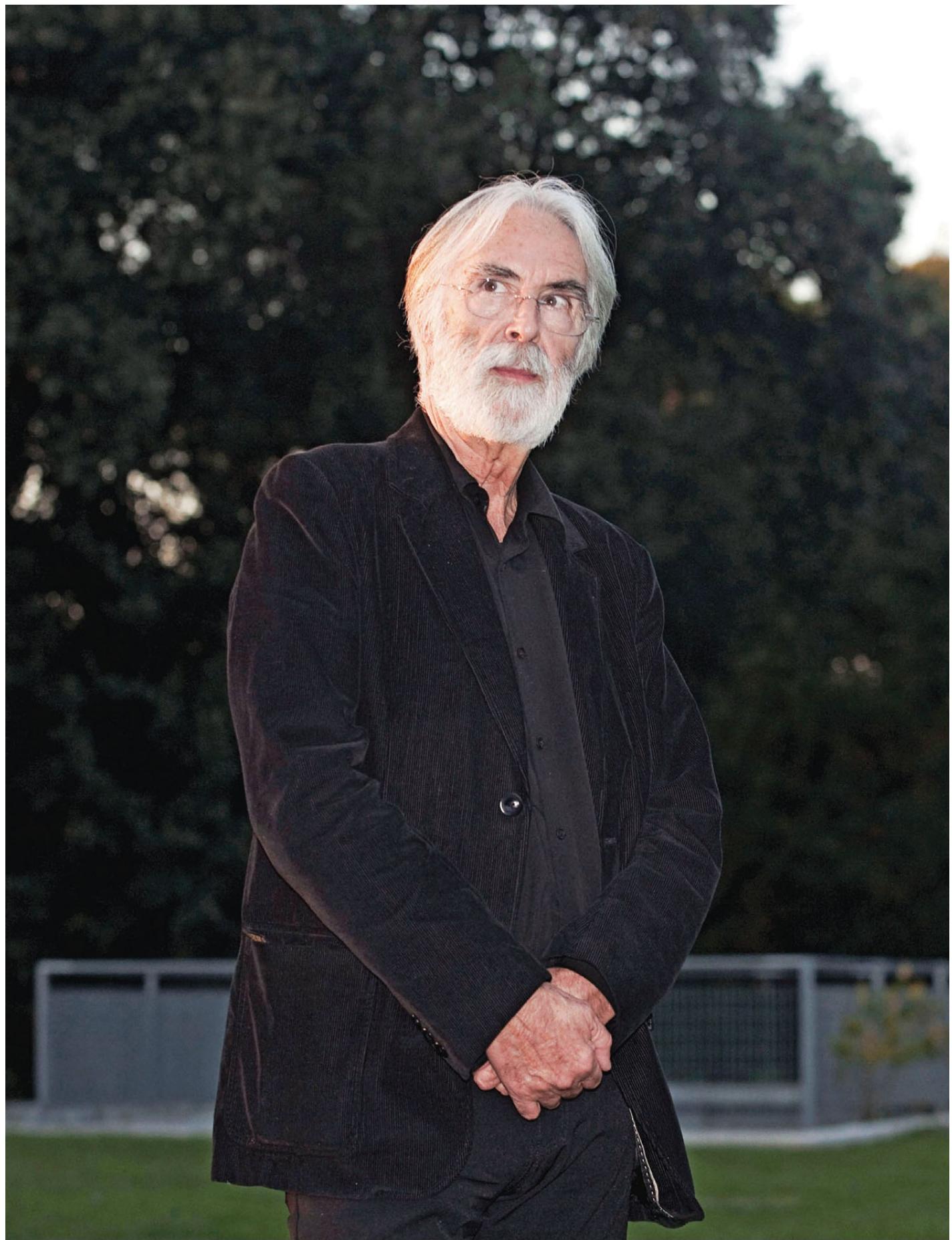
MH: I always say that film is closest to music, not literature or theatre. For me, if a film hasn't the feeling of music, it's not successful. A film lives by its rhythms; like music, it's a bit like an arrow passing through time. It begins its journey at a particular moment and ends at another, and between those two points is a route which has to be carefully directed. That structure is rhythmic; if we don't find the right rhythm to tell a story, it could be the best story in the world, but it won't work.

The difficulty is that this is something difficult to teach or learn. In music, if someone hasn't a musical ear, when they hear an 'off' note they won't notice. You can't reproach anyone for that; either one has an 'ear' or one doesn't. It's the same in film. You need to have an 'ear' in relation to the actors. My stepfather had an absolutely pitch-perfect ear, and if he heard a false note he'd wince in pain. It's the same for me if an actor's 'off'; I notice at once. So while we can learn how to correct an 'off' note, we first need to be able to hear it.

Or think of when you open a book and read a couple of pages; you usually know at once whether you want to read it or not. That's almost always to do with rhythm. I've nothing against complicated sentences, but the writing has to be attractive. Thomas Mann's sentences are very complicated, for example, but they're written with such extraordinary elegance. Sometimes you need to read a sentence twice because it's so long, but you still get pleasure from reading it.

GA: In many ways this film feels like your most personal yet.





 **MH:** It is, and it's also the most directly emotional. There are scenes in my earlier films which were very personal, of course; but a film about how the media portray violence obviously involves a more intellectual approach, so there's more distance for the viewer. That said, even here, to arouse pity in the viewer would be deadly for the film, so I knew from the outset that sentimentality should be avoided. But yes, there's a lot of me in it; many things come from my own life.

GA: Like Georges's description of the excruciating funeral he's been to?

MH: (Laughs) That's exactly what happened at my father's funeral! If we didn't have some humour in there, you might not believe it. The same goes for the story about the film Georges speaks about, and his story of the summer camp. Those things also happened to me. Nothing is invented! For example, I had an aunt in her nineties; her health was deteriorating and she tried to kill herself by taking pills, but we found her and saved her. She asked me if I'd help her to die, but I told her I couldn't; apart from all other considerations, I stood to inherit. But later she tried again, while we were away at the Cannes Film Festival, and she succeeded.

GA: Another personal element was your basing the studio set on your own parents' house.

MH: When you're writing a script, it's good to have a concrete setting in mind; the geography gives you ideas. So I used my parents' apartment as a model: the layout's identical. But we decorated the set with French furniture, not Biedermeier.

GA: Very early on, you have Georges and Anne discover that someone's tried to break into their apartment. Was that to indicate their sense of vulnerability?

MH: I wanted it to be almost a catalyst for her stroke; it worries them. I remember my aunt coming back from holiday in Italy and having an attack simply because the toilet flush didn't work. So I was looking for something small that might set off an attack. At any rate, that was the idea behind it, though one can interpret it as one likes. Someone said it was death trying to break in! (Laughs) I've nothing against such an interpretation; it wasn't my intention, but it's possible!

GA: In that case, let's discuss a sequence

I'm unsure about: an interlude which elides time, where you show six paintings in succession. Almost the entire drama takes place in the apartment, but the paintings shown are all landscapes. Why?

MH: There are two turning points in the film. The first comes after Anne's first attack; it's a montage of the apartment's empty rooms at night. The second comes after Georges loses his temper with her; I thought I needed *una fermata* there, like a pause in music. I felt it would be good to show the paintings in the apartment – it would be like opening up the view from the apartment, but in a way to do with art rather than to do with reality. I myself can't interpret this; I just liked the idea of landscapes without buildings. But it wasn't easy. I wanted 18th-century landscapes and my designer Jean-Vincent Puzos showed me

photos of some which were excellent. But they were all Scandinavian, and we found they were all in Scandinavian museums and impossible to get! So we had people go off to the Paris art shops and they found about 40 oil paintings of landscapes that were either empty or, in a few cases, with one or two small human figures. So I chose from those. Then came another difficulty: how to order the paintings, which depicted different times of day; one would be dusk, another bright sunlight. Initially I showed the lightest first and moved towards darkness, but in the end I did the opposite, to contrast with the dynamics of the film.

GA: You work repeatedly not only with certain actors, but with producers, editors and cinematographers.

MH: It would be stupid not to continue if we get on well and work well together. Sometimes someone will have other work that prevents us working together, so I always try to have a couple of people to choose from. I try to work with people I get on with, because I can be complicated sometimes and my crew needs to know it's not personal if I shout at them. And besides, these people are all also excellent technicians.

GA: In the Cannes press book for 'Amour' you give special credit to the foley artists.

MH: Of all the technicians, I feel these are real creators, as much as the actors or myself. Yet they're underestimated. I'm a huge fan of foley artists; they're magicians, creating a world out of nothing. And I just wanted to acknowledge that.

GA: When we spoke about 'The White Ribbon' you said you find shooting stressful. Was 'Amour' any easier? You had just a few superb actors, and it was shot in the studio.

MH: It's always difficult to do something well,

I entirely agree with Hitchcock. I like everything meticulously planned. I'm not at all a fan of improvisation

and easier to do something mediocre. Naturally, to do a film like this is easier than making one with 30 people on 100 locations, where you're dependent on time, weather etc. But this time there were other considerations, like the health of the actors. Also, with a film like this you have to be more meticulous with the details; it's like looking at a mirror with a magnifying glass, you can see the tiniest distortion. With lots of characters in different locations, you can juggle different stories, whereas with two people in one setting, it's hard to stop it becoming boring. So to write a film limited to the three unities is more difficult than writing a multi-strand film. But it's not as if I ask myself beforehand whether it's going to be harder; I simply want to tell a story and find a way to tell it.

But it's much nicer shooting in a studio rather than having to wait for the sun in natural settings and so on. If it were up to me, I'd only ever shoot in the studio, as you've far more control. In that, I entirely agree with Hitchcock. I work in a similar way to him: I like everything meticulously planned. I'm not at all a fan of improvisation. But that has nothing to do with the quality of a finished film. After all, people have different ways of working, and others feel too enclosed in a studio. I personally try to rule out chance as much as possible when I make a film, but of course one can only go so far – especially if there are, as here, a couple of scenes involving a pigeon!

But it's not just Hitchcock. Take Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* – a lot of that was shot in the studio. It really is one of cinema's great masterpieces. When I teach at the university I sometimes show *La Règle du jeu* to the students. Not being professional filmmakers, they ask me why I chose it; to them it seems so simple and light, like nothing. Yet it has so much in it. They don't see the complexity behind that apparent simplicity, the incredible travelling shots and the outstanding control of tempo.

GA: You alternate between films with large casts and more intimate chamber pieces; do you have a preference for making big or small films?



Chamber piece: Haneke, left, with Emmanuelle Riva and Jean-Louis Trintignant on the set of 'Amour'

MH: No, but I prefer to make films that have intimate scenes. Even in *The White Ribbon*, where some scenes involved a great many people, most scenes had two or three people at most. I always try to include intimate scenes because they can dig deeper. To have 12 people all speaking to each other might be a virtuoso scene – if it's done well – as that's very hard to do; but for myself I prefer to write smaller, more concentrated scenes.

GA: I watched 'The White Ribbon' again recently, and what struck me was how tender it is. The unpleasant events are only a small part of it; moreover, every character is shown to have a good side.

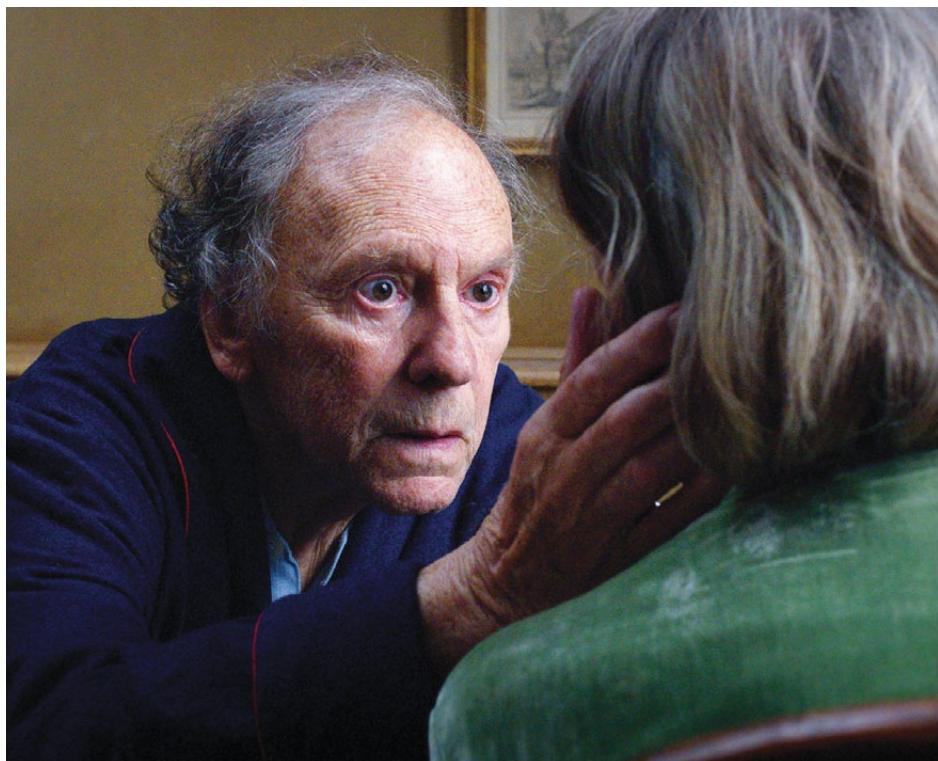
MH: When you write something, you have to protect your characters, be their advocate; actors should do that too. It's stupid for actors simply to criticise the character they're playing. A character must be interesting, but a total idiot or a shit isn't interesting. So I've always tried to show compassion for the people in my films, and give them some aspect that's fascinating or, at the very least, amusing. Shakespeare's Richard III may be a monster, but he's a very intelligent monster. A virtuoso monster!

It's like when a character's telling a lie; in a mediocre film you can tell at once that they're lying. When you have someone lying, you must hide it, otherwise it's just not worth the bother of having them lie. This relates to why I don't like discussing with an actor the character they're playing. If you do that, you may reach opinions about the character, and the risk is that the actor consequently doesn't play the character but plays their opinion of the character – as a good guy, or as a shit. That's a common trap. **GA: While thinking about 'Amour', it occurred to me that death is a very real presence in most of your films. In cinema death's usually used primarily to provoke an emotion in the viewer: fear, sadness, laughter, pity, excitement. That's what 'Funny Games' (1997) is about. But some films treat death seriously: what it really means to stop living or to lose someone. That's true of your first feature 'The Seventh Continent' ('Der siebente Kontinent', 1989), and of many of them since. Were you conscious of that?**

MH: Not at all. I never think about any overarching idea. I have an idea, I make a film. I might talk about certain aspects of that idea, about things that touch me, but I don't have a programme. [Director of the Austrian Film Museum] Alexander Horwath told me that *Amour* has similarities to *The Seventh Continent*: the end of a family, a *huis clos*, very formal framing. I hadn't thought of that, but these things happen. Still, I hope they won't turn out to be my first and last films! It's a little like Emmanuelle, who's now a healthy 85 years old, saying that her first film was *Hiroshima mon amour* and now this film has *Amour* in its title...

GA: You've recently had great success in terms of both prizes and bigger audiences. Has that changed things much for you?

MH: No, except that I don't have to fight so much to get certain things. If I say I want to do this or have this actor, and it's not an excessive request, they now go



Face to face: Jean-Louis Trintignant in 'Amour', which Haneke describes as his most personal film

along with me. That's very agreeable.

GA: Why did you go into cinema?

MH: When I was a boy I loved films. Both my parents were actors. I also saw American films and I really liked James Dean; that was a discovery for us all. But I didn't really discover auteur cinema until I was at university. I became a real fan, going three times a day to the cinema; I wasn't a very good student! I loved films, but I told myself that as cinema didn't really exist in Austria, there was no chance of getting into it. I was lucky, however: I was already working as a film critic for radio and some newspapers, and then my father, who worked in casting, got me a three-month internship at Südwestfunk radio – I was a trainee there for three months. It so happened they were looking for an editor and writer to replace someone who was retiring, and they looked at the interns and chose me. By that time I'd already had some short stories published, so I continued with the writing, and that's how I got into TV and theatre. But I really wanted to make films. My first script was a little like *Funny Games* without the self-reflexive side; it was more of a thriller. I even got some money for it – 300,000 Deutschmarks – but it wasn't enough to make a film, as I didn't actually know anyone. So I had to forego it and continue in the theatre.

GA: Was your television work very different from your later features?

MH: I suppose it was quite 'experimental'; fairly classical when compared to some cinema, but quite daring for TV. There's one piece I quite like: the first big one, *Lemmings* [1979], which touches on most of the themes I went on to deal with. The ending doesn't really work, but the first part isn't bad. (*Laughs*) Lemmings are those animals that collectively commit suicide.

GA: How much do you think being Austrian has shaped your work?

MH: Well, I've inevitably been affected by the climate which exists here, though I've never taken it upon myself to represent Austrian culture. But it's not for me to answer your question. Some have said my work bears a similarity to the novels of Thomas Bernhard. Maybe; I can't tell. But I've never set out to make Austrian films. I just make films about what interests me, and since I'm a product of this country, there must be things in them that could be deciphered as being Austrian. But that's for others to do.

I do think, however, that one can perhaps distinguish some Austrian films from their German counterparts. Austrians tend to have a finely tuned ear for nuance; Germans are clearer. For example, if the Viennese want to say something, they never say what they actually want to say; they use other words. Perhaps it's a little more elegant, but it's also a way of playing with people who don't understand. When Germans come to Vienna, they often feel we don't take them very seriously, because we play games they don't understand. That's very Viennese.

GA: Do you think they might be a little like the English in that respect?

MH: No, the English have much more wit; they've a brilliance in humour. We don't really have a lot of humour in Austria. Austrians are more ironic, which isn't the same thing. The English have a lot of humour, a lot of sarcasm, and a sense of the absurd. Monty Python could only be from England. It's unimaginable that they could have come out of Austria, Germany or France.



 **GA:** You've always been alert to your responsibilities as an artist presenting something to the world. Has your approach mellowed? Is 'Amour' perhaps a little gentler?

MH: Others have said that, but I don't think it's necessarily true. It's just the theme: love. When I dealt with the representation of violence, for example, the theme had less need for tenderness. So perhaps my next film won't feel so tender; I don't know.

GA: Might your films have perhaps become more optimistic?

MH: I don't think so. Perhaps it's that I'm trying to be less theoretical. People have often put me in the same ideological camp (though not of course at the same artistic level!) as Brecht. I never really agreed, but in one sense – the use of alienation – it might have been true. And if there's a change, it's that I am moving steadily away from that, in the direction of Chekhov – whom I've always held in higher esteem than Brecht anyway. I just hadn't tried to work in that territory before, because what Chekhov did, with its basis in tiny nuances, is very difficult. I never did Chekhov in the theatre; I always said I'd only attempt it with the best actors in the world and even then we'd never do justice to the standards of the play. But in a way I'm more and more interested in that now, so maybe, because of that, my techniques have become richer; maybe there's less rigidity within my films now. I hope so, anyway. I can't judge myself, but that's what I'm trying to do. So a film like *The Seventh Continent*, for example, wasn't a realistic film; it was a model, and a model is always more rigid. Now perhaps we can say that a film like *Amour* is also a model, but hopefully it's more than just a model; hopefully it's getting closer to life and all its contradictory complexity. That's what interests me more and more – to avoid solutions. I don't believe in solutions.

GA: Do you have any regrets about your career?

MH: I should have liked to make a science-fiction series, but it's too late, because things changed. Otherwise, no; I've made all the films I wanted to. You can start successfully and then later have people not wanting to hear about you, dismissing you as old hat and saying you always do the same thing or have nothing left to say. But I'm lucky; my progress has been steady. And it's a great privilege to be able to continue. In theatre and cinema there are people who were once star directors but can't now get work for some reason. It's not that they got bad. But there's always a great risk, when one's forever writing or shooting in a world of one's own, that one can become isolated from the lives of others. And to hold on to a worldview based on those experiences can be dangerous, because times change and the young come along with new ways of doing things. So one can find oneself frustrated and bitter because one no longer understands the world or why it doesn't seem to work anymore. Indeed, the biggest danger is not to understand why it's changed; to say, "I haven't changed, so I don't get why everyone else has changed." Staying alert to how life develops can be pretty difficult.



Keeping a distance: the village children in 'The White Ribbon'

I've always tried to show compassion for the people in my films, and give them some aspect that's fascinating or amusing

GA: Do ideas come easily to you?

MH: I make the films I do, but I don't have dozens of other ideas in me. I just observe the world around me and respond to it; if something frustrates or worries me, I start to think about it. I'm not someone who's bombarded by ideas; they come once I've begun work on a project, but for me to decide on a subject always involves a period of reflection which has been set off by some occurrence.

GA: I'm always wary of equating any artist with his or her work. But I suspect many who've seen your films, which can be quite dark, might be surprised to learn that you're a warm, bright, well-balanced person usually happy to have a laugh and share your enthusiasms about cinema. What I'm getting at is how your work relates to your life; what purpose it fulfills.

MH: I've no idea. I don't find my films so dark; I find them realistic. I look at the world and try to deal in my work with what I see there. Of course, in my private life I see the same things and probably deal with them differently, but in my films I try to handle them in a way that for me is acceptable. In cinema you have to stay with the truth. There's a famous

poem by Brecht, 'To Those Born Later':
Truly, I live in dark times!

The guileless word is folly. A smooth forehead Suggests insensitivity. The man who laughs Has simply not yet had The terrible news.

What kind of times are they, when A talk about trees is almost a crime Because it implies silence about so many horrors?

This important poem has always been a kind of programme for me. It's true that if we talk as if everything's fine, it's a crime against the real situation. I think art is obliged to speak of truth, so I made a conscious decision to speak only of that. At the same time, we can try to be happy in our lives, so I try to live in an agreeable way. We can laugh, or go to Paris, but that doesn't stop me from seeing the catastrophe of our world.

What's the solution? I could go to Africa like Albert Schweitzer. But I'm no saint. So I try to be serious in my own work. And I don't see a contradiction between that and my life. We're allowed to have fun, otherwise we'd just get ill! I don't know if that's a good answer. But I do know it's a romantic myth that those who do serious work are always serious people. ☺

 **'Amour' is released in the UK on 16 November, and is reviewed on page 87. Thanks to Suzy Gillett for help with translating the interview. The translation of the poem is from: 'Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956', translated by Erich Fried, John Willett and Ralph Manheim**



'The Seventh Continent'



'Funny Games'

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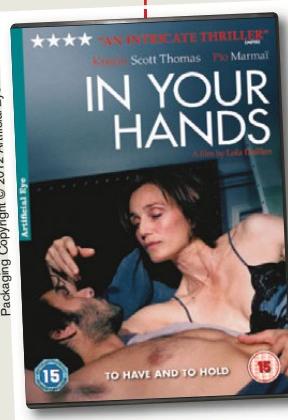


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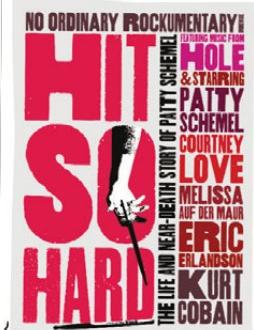


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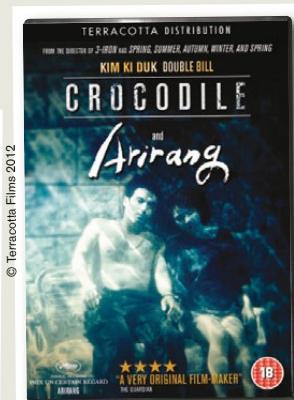
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PREVIEW

IN DEFENCE OF TIME

The resurfacing of the elusive Second Oberhausen Manifesto is sparking new appreciation for the observational eye of Peter Nestler

By Olaf Möller

In 1965, during the 11th Oberhausen Film Festival, a pamphlet was circulated that over the years became informally known as the Second Oberhausen Manifesto. The first had been published three years earlier, becoming a turning point in film history: with its public reading on 28 February 1962, the New German Cinema was born. Over the decades, the Second Oberhausen Manifesto was vaguely remembered as a rebuttal of the New German Cinema establishment, which seemed to busy itself more with drawing up subsidy laws (advantageous to its members) than making films; yet its precise contents seemed to be lost to history, since for decades a copy proved impossible to find – not even the festival kept one in its archive, which says a lot about the importance that was attributed to it in 1965.

These days, the Second Oberhausen Manifesto is generally remembered as the first public appearance of the so-called New Munich Group (Neue Münchner Gruppe), whose protagonists, Rudolf Thome and Klaus Lemke, would become something like cult auteurs. In their films of the late 1960s and early 70s, former Heidegger student Lemke and natural-born accountant Thome showed that they'd watched Godard's early works a dozen times each, read *Cahiers du cinéma* religiously and then – and only then – done some serious thinking of their own. The results: frivolously

off-beat yet rigorously formalist dreams of classical American cinema – pure maverick stuff populated by white-hot girls and ultra-cool guys who looked as good brushing their teeth as holding a gun. An essential part of the Second Oberhausen Manifesto's mystique is the seemingly incongruous pairing of these two (plus Max Zihlmann, their screenwriter of choice at the time) with Jean-Marie Straub and Peter Nestler, whose respective ideas about cinema tended towards political pertinence and aesthetic austerity – hipness wasn't for them.

In 2011, during preparations for the 50th-anniversary celebrations of the original Oberhausen Manifesto, a copy of the second finally surfaced – and proved to be a major surprise. As it turns out, Thome-Lemke-Zihlmann were little more than an addendum or postscript. The majority of the text reads like a protest note against the ostracising of Peter Nestler and his cinema; up until then, all of his films had been met with consternation if not hostility. Most signatories were close collaborators of Nestler's at the time (and some would be again later), including Reinhard Schnell, Dieter Süverkrüp and Kurt Ulrich; the agitator-mastermind behind it all was Straub, who to this day calls Nestler one of Europe's greatest modern filmmakers. Justifiably so.

But it didn't help. In December 1966, faced with ever greater difficulties in funding his films, Nestler left the Federal Republic of Germany for his mother's native Sweden, where he soon found gainful employment at the state-run broadcasting service SVT. Between 1967 and 1985, almost all of his films were produced for Swedish television; they make up the vast bulk of his œuvre. Since 1988, his films have been produced

mainly with German money; nevertheless, Nestler still prefers to live in Sweden.

But back to Oberhausen 1965. Nestler, at that point, had made four films. The third, *Mühlheim (Ruhr)* (1964), became something of a local *cause célèbre* when members of the small Ruhr valley town's council publicly attacked it for supposedly falsifying the place's image, making it look poor and desolate. As Nestler later recalled, people were enraged about the way he showed the miserable living conditions of workers – but not about the fact that workers had to live like that. Similar objections greeted the works that came before and after it, *Aufsätze* (1963) and *Ödenwaldstetten* (1964). In both cases, prosperous Western Europe both looks and sounds backwards, and Nestler was attacked for letting people obviously unaccustomed to talking in public express themselves without 'protecting' them (ie without commenting on their language or using a professional actor to dub them).

In *Aufsätze*, pupils from a tiny school deep in the Bern hinterland read compositions they've written detailing their lives and hopes for the future. They consist of basic vocabulary, short sentences and simple observations, but the main thing is the voices: you can hear how hard it is for them to speak at all, and the effort it takes to use standard German rather than dialect; this is the sound of rural poverty. A similar thing occurs in *Ödenwaldstetten*. If one

In Nestler's documentaries of the 1960s, prosperous Western Europe both looks and sounds backwards



'By the Dike Sluice' ('Am Siel')



'Up the Danube' ('Die Donau Rauf')



Against nature: 'The North Calotte'/'Die Nordkalotte' traces the impact of industrialisation

compares this film to, say, *Notizen aus dem Altmühlthal* (1961) by Hans Rolf Strobel and Heinrich Tichawsky, two undersignedees of the Oberhausen Manifesto feted at the time as the Federal Republic's most important new documentary filmmakers, you immediately understand why the cultural mainstream considered Nestler's work such an affront. Strobel and Tichawsky always seem to know what's right and wrong, what people need and what they should want; Nestler mainly recalls facts and conveys observations. Strobel and Tichawsky's voiceovers are delivered in a stentorian tone with a certain authoritarian verve; Nestler's sound more like information soberly related to a friend, neighbour or co-worker. Strobel and Tichawsky preferred trained speakers, Nestler authentic-sounding ones. For Strobel and Tichawsky, their interviewees' voices serve mainly to provide local or social colour; for Nestler, they're an integral part of the information being conveyed. To go back to *Aufsätze*: the compositions alone are quite touching in their bluff honesty; the voices of their authors make them devastating. A year later, Nestler was again attacked over *From Greece* (*Von Griechenland*, 1965), this time for not letting a woman speak in her own voice; the scene in question opens with her talking before the audio fades out to let the narration summarise her tale. This time, direct cinema was the aesthetic guideline being enforced.

But it was not only Nestler's use of sound, voice and text that the schoolmarms found objectionable: it was his aesthetics, which time and again were called amateurish, in the sense of incompetent. It's true that Nestler's filmmaking is decidedly not by the book, insofar as he uses only what to him seems absolutely necessary. Each image has equal importance and weight; having to build a scene with different shots (editing back and forth between places or faces) is something Nestler deeply dislikes. One image equals one piece of information; editing a scene together by using a few frames of this and a few feet of that probably feels like cheating to him.

The same holds true of Nestler's sense of rhythm and narrative development: there's nothing well-rounded or smooth about them. It never feels as if he's forcing his material into a mould to conform with conventions or make his ideas more easily accessible; what he does is follow his subject's development. For Nestler, cinema is the art of presenting information in a sensible, useful, applicable way. Editing means creating a convincing chain of information; when the subject has been fully discussed, an argument followed through to the end, a work has found its perfect form.

Think of it like this: somebody is sitting in front of you with a pile of documents. He tells you about the persecution of Sinti and Roma in Germany and Austria (*Being Gypsy/Att vara Zigenare*, 1970); or about life in Vietnam during wartime (*Images of Vietnam/Bilder från Vietnam*, 1972); or about veterans' memories of the Spanish Civil War (*Spain!/Spanien!*, 1973); or about the connection between shipbuilding, the transportation of



Framing the image: 'Verteidigung der Zeit'

men and goods, international trade and arms manufacturing (*Foreigners Part 1: Ships and Guns/Utländer Part 1: Båtar och kanoner*, 1977); or how ordinary people become informers (*The Metamorphosis of the Good Neighbour/Die Verwandlung des guten Nachbarn*, 2002); or Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub making their last feature together (in *Verteidigung der Zeit*, 2006). To do all of that, he has had to order his information so that he can take one document after another from the pile and show them to you while talking about the subject. To be convincing and captivating, it's important that he doesn't have to rummage through the pile, and doesn't put his hand on an image to cover half of it, so that you only see what he

wants you to see. But, if there's something in an image that he considers especially noteworthy, he might point it out with a finger. There's a word for all this: transparency.

This might all sound a bit dry, even brittle. Far from it. Nestler's films have an astonishing, sometimes breathtaking beauty. It's not that he makes the world look gorgeous – quite the contrary. Nestler is able to recognise and convey beauty. Hope and brightness, the world's shining, are also facts of life – information he shares with the audience. ☀

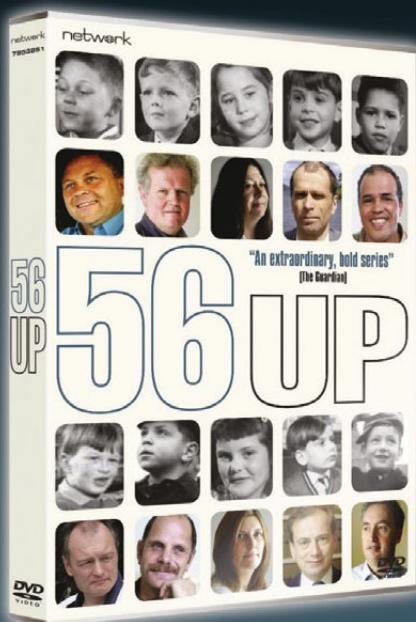
i A Peter Nestler retrospective runs at the Goethe-Institut London, Tate Modern and Showroom Workstation, Sheffield, from 9 to 17 November



Local antihero: Nestler's 'Mülheim (Ruhr)' was criticised by the council of the town where it was shot

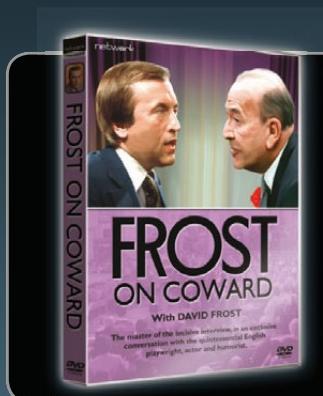
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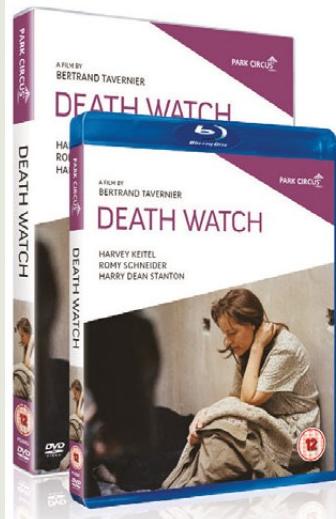
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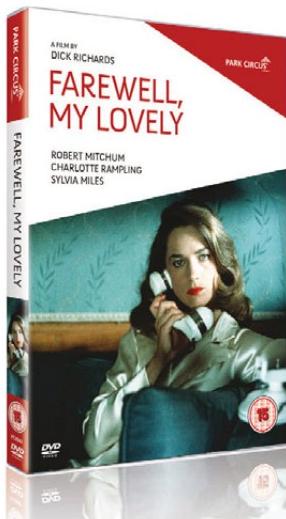
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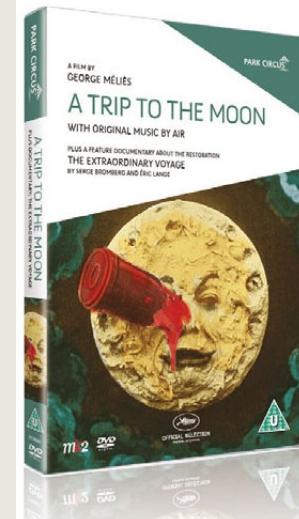


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WAS YUGOSLAVIA A FILM STUDIO?

Mila Turajlic's documentary 'Cinema Komunisto' explores the rich cinema culture of Tito's Yugoslavia

By Michael Brooke

The most entertaining and consistently surprising documentary about the cinema of the former Communist bloc since Dana Ranga and Andrew Horn's socialist-musicals paean *East Side Story* (1997), Mila Turajlic's extraordinary *Cinema Komunisto* presents a history of Yugoslav cinema from the 1940s to the 1990s, paying particular attention to the dictator Josip Broz Tito's often decidedly hands-on involvement.

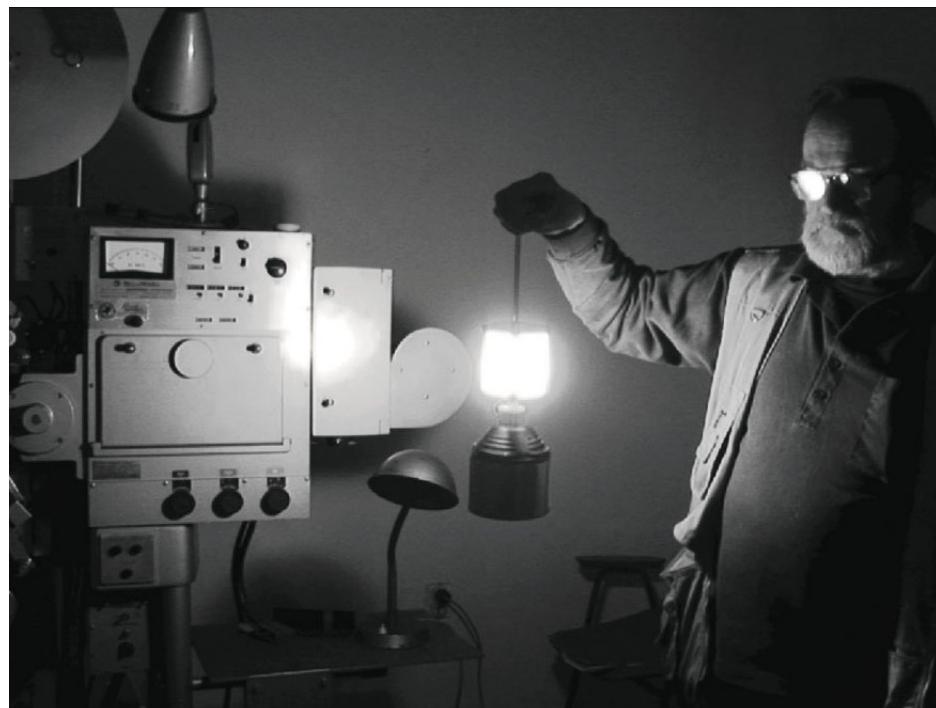
It started as a portrait of Belgrade's Avala Film Studios, a regular destination for international stars like Richard Burton, Sophia Loren and Orson Welles half a century ago, since fallen into neglect and disrepair. "I was aware that this place has a real emotional, historical value that is going to disappear," Turajlic says. "I kept wanting to explore, to go behind doors that hadn't been opened in 20 years. But there was definitely a point where I had gone far enough in my research to be able to say, 'OK, what do these studios actually stand for?' The turning point for me was to say: 'How fascinating would it be to try to make a film in which we say that Yugoslavia itself was a film studio? How far would this metaphor get us in understanding Yugoslavia?'"

Under Tito (an obsessive film buff whose personal projectionist screened 8,801 films for him over a 32-year career), Yugoslavia's film output was both prolific and hugely popular. "It's not a statistic I can verify," Turajlic says, "but we were told in film school that Yugoslavia was second only to France for being a [European] country in which domestic films were more watched than foreign films. So there was a real, real love of cinema, and so many quotes from Yugoslav films have found their way into our daily language and into daily conversation. There's a sense of communal property over these films, regardless of the degree of their propaganda."

This is doubly impressive because, unlike almost anywhere else behind the old Iron Curtain, Western films were widely distributed. "There's this one Hollywood film that absolutely changed everything," Turajlic says. "Esther Williams's *Bathing Beauty* [1944] became the most watched American film in Serbia in the 50s. It sparked a whole genre of light summer comedies. It definitely influenced Yugoslav filmmakers, much in the way that the French New Wave influenced Yugoslav filmmakers in the 60s."

Talking of which, one glaring absence from

During the 90s there was so little talk of Tito's Yugoslavia, so the film is really filling a big hole in our public memory



Magic lantern: directed by Mila Turajlic, below, 'Cinema Komunisto' engages with 'Yugonostalgia'



Roll it: Tito's projectionist Leka Konstantinovic

Cinema Komunisto is the work of internationally feted Yugoslav auteurs such as Dusan Makavejev, Emir Kusturica or (barring a brief namecheck) Aleksandar Petrovic. "This is definitely not a compendium of the best that Yugoslav cinema has to offer," Turajlic says. "In fact, the best Yugoslav films aren't even mentioned. I was more interested in following how consistently the government had worked on creating an official narrative through using cinema, and in talking to the figures themselves about how they placed themselves within that goal. The auteur films really don't fit within that."

Did she set out to attract both international and domestic audiences? "Yes, definitely, and that was the tricky part of the editing, which took a year. I started from the premise that this film would

potentially be seen by people who would not even be able to tell you where Yugoslavia had been on a map. But at the same time I really hoped it would have a career in the Balkans. And there, very often parents went to see it with their children. During the 90s there was so little talk of Tito's Yugoslavia, so it's really filling a big hole in our public memory. And I was really surprised by the deep emotion that this film stirs within an audience. There's a lot of 'Yugonostalgia' afoot. My personal interpretation is that it has a lot more to do with the economic uncertainty people in the Balkans are faced with at the moment. They don't wish to return to communism, but I just think it's really telling of how little people feel positioned within the narrative that's being offered today, particularly in Bosnia."

Turajlic's flawless English derives from many years abroad, including studies in London. "It gave me the distance I needed to be able to come back to Serbia and say, 'I feel a strong need to explore some of this stuff.' There's a real tradition of erasing the past in present-day Serbia. I felt a really strong motivation for this to be part of the first film I made."

She's currently pitching her next film, a similarly era-traversing do: "It'll only sound cryptic if I tell you what it's about, but it's about a door in an apartment in Belgrade that's been locked for 55 years and – through that, again – we're trying to tell a much larger story." ☀

i 'Cinema Komunisto' is released in the UK on 23 November, and is reviewed on page 89



ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE



The splice of life: Luke Fowler at work editing one of his 16mm films

Nominated for the Turner Prize, Luke Fowler makes 16mm films that blend archival biography with a very personal subjectivity

By Melissa Gronlund

In the dozen films he has made since graduating from art school in Dundee, Luke Fowler has focused on the twin questions of documentary and biography. His films, mostly made on lush 16mm stock, comprise a mixture of varied archival footage and more impressionistic images – of nature, of shopping malls, of urban vistas of pigeons and rooftops – that Fowler shoots himself. Usually focusing on one historical figure, his films sketch the stories of their subjects, while also subtly undermining the idea that one can have stable access to a personality through external effects alone.

With this intrusion of his own footage or “filmed notes”, Fowler foregrounds his own subjectivity, highlighting the limitations of any filmmaker or viewer faced with found footage from the past. “Primarily these filmed notes are concrete experiences that I have had in the world, filtered through the recording apparatus,” he explains. “In this way I can compare my lived experience to its representation, something I can only guess at with archive material – which shows experiences that are refracted through someone else’s eyes and values.”

Nominated for this year’s Turner Prize, Fowler’s 2011 film *All Divided Selves* is currently showing in Tate Britain’s exhibition of the nominees’ work. It’s his third film on the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who argued for the social causes of mental disease and sought to destigmatise it for patients and public alike. A more recent Fowler work, meanwhile, screened as part of the Experimental section of this year’s BFI London Film Festival: *The Poor Stockinger, the Luddite Cropper and the Deluded Followers of Joanna Southcott* focuses on E.P. Thompson and his project to teach Marxist political and social history to adults in industrial towns of Yorkshire from the 1940s to the 1960s. Both films are the result of careful research, using their subjects to present an alternative history – or a history of alternatives.

Melissa Gronlund: Could you talk about your interest in R.D. Laing, whom you’ve made three films about? ‘All Divided Selves’ continues the theme expressed in your earlier films of investigating figures who are both on the margins of society, and who have made it their life’s work to reclaim or validate something that comes out of those marginalia – namely the fact that there is more than one way to see the world.

Luke Fowler: I want to say from the outset that I am wary of the connotation of the term ‘marginal’ to describe my subjects – marginal infers these people are the typical documentarian’s fascinating sociopaths, who have failed to adapt to society or are Thoreau-like figures retreating into nature.

I don’t think you can characterise R.D. Laing, Cornelius Cardew [the subject of Fowler’s 2006 film *From Scattered Points*] or Xentos Jones [*The Way Out*, 2003] in that way. They were or are all very successful in their fields, and challenged the values and foundations of the fields they worked in.

My interest in Laing began as a teenager in Glasgow, when Laing’s book *The Divided Self* disappeared. But it was only when I saw the mental suffering of a loved one – and the immediate recourse to drugs that the psychiatrist offered – that I took to Laing’s work to better understand what was happening. Since then – and since reading his works and the secondary texts – I have come to appreciate the magnitude of his thought.

MG: Your films often use natural imagery spliced in between what we might call the ‘informational bits’. I was struck in ‘All Divided Selves’ by the use of alternately rough and smooth images – like the water smoothing over rock faces – as well as by the footage shot in the forest, which formed the site of your earlier films such as ‘Bogman Palmjaguar’ (2007). What draws you to use these natural and landscape sources in your films?

LF: There is a constant struggle between image and text in film – the problem being that in orthodox films, the text, narration, dialogue, interview etc [are] the primary source of exposition, and the image is reduced to reinforcing the message that is given on the soundtrack. I start off from the basis of treating both the sound and image

NEWS AND EVENTS

I am trying – to quote E.P. Thompson – to rescue my subjects from “the enormous condescension of posterity”

as discrete ‘data’ that can be employed in a number of ways within a sequence.

The filmed footage that I collect over the course of making a film serves in a multitude of ways as memories, snapshots, references, associations, ruptures, metaphors, studies and digressions. And though almost all of the archive material I feature illustrates a point or serves a purpose, when I go out for a walk with the camera, I have no expectation of what I might film. I only intend to force myself to film something that morning, wherever I find myself.

I should add that I do not whisk myself off for jaunts in the countryside to film the wonders of nature. Much of *All Divided Selves* was filmed on my doorstep during two artist’s residencies: one in Bard College in upstate New York, the other at Cove Park, Argyll, which is a stone’s throw away from the cordoned-off Faslane base, the biggest military-industrial complex in Scotland!

MG: What proportion of your films is comprised of found footage, and what proportion do you shoot yourself? One never knows the provenance of the images – how much credence to put in them. But you’ve also created more formal films that you’ve shot entirely yourself, such as your ‘Tenement Films’ (2009).

LF: I think there’s 77 minutes of archival material in *All Divided Selves* [out of 93 minutes in total], which could give the impression that it is largely archival. But if you watch the film, that’s not the overall impression; there is a stark contrast between my own footage and the archival. Part of the motivation in doing that was to assert the subjective over the objective – to have the personal views rub against and taint the *vérité* material or the talk shows, TV dramas and newsreel footage that I use.

By offering a reflexive and subjective account of my subjects, I am trying – to quote E.P. Thompson – to rescue them from the “enormous condescension of posterity”.

MG: Your new film ‘The Poor Stockinger, the Luddite Cropper and the Deluded Followers of

Joanna Southcott’ focuses on Thompson. Could you talk about the narrative arc of the film? I found it bleaker than your other films, mostly because of the imagery interspersed within it – often of grey shopping centres, generic street views, council estates in disrepair.

LF: It’s not so much a narrative arc as a structural frame to hang a series of arguments about education and history on. The visual structure was loosely dictated by revisiting the locations where E.P. Thompson’s evening classes were taught across the various post-industrial towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire. I say “loosely” because Peter [Hutton, Fowler’s collaborator on the project] and I were both filming, independently of each other, and there was no brief; it was very much improvised around what we saw and felt on the day.

The spoken narration, which follows and accompanies the contemporary images of the towns and buildings, [is made up of] historic documents: Thompson’s class reports and a rather long and remarkable memo that was circulated internally within the WEA [Workers’ Educational Association] titled ‘Against University Standards’. The texts very beautifully and ironically articulate Thompson’s dialectical thinking about teaching working adults: the teacher must allow his facts to be corrected by the collective, social experiences of the class, but must not sacrifice serious study to the limitations and distortions of subjective memory.

MG: Could you say a bit more about the memo?

LF: It addresses head-on the repetitive series of frustrations and barriers E.P. Thompson encounters in teaching adults – that they do not largely live up to his idea of a militant and class-conscious community. It’s a rant against the university edict to teach classes objectively – that is, in selecting which facts to present, or in constructing history as a science – and reveals this as an illusion in which one always presents, consciously or unconsciously, an attitude to the facts. ☺

i *‘All Divided Selves’ screens daily at Tate Britain, London until 6 January, as part of the Turner Prize 2012 exhibition. ‘The Poor Stockinger, the Luddite Cropper and the Deluded Followers of Joanna Southcott’ is at Wolverhampton Art Gallery until 18 January*



‘The Poor Stockinger, the Luddite Cropper...’



‘All Divided Selves’

● Rosemarie Trockel’s series of five films entitled ‘Manu’s Spleen (I-V)’ will be shown together for the first time ever in the UK at the ICA, London on 11 November. The protagonist of the films, played by Manu Burkhardt, strikes a number of detached poses in various situations, questioning the social implications and possibilities of art. Screen legend Udo Kier also makes a notable appearance in ‘Manu’s Spleen II’.

www.ica.org.uk

● Jeff Keen, who sadly died earlier this year, receives a career retrospective in Brighton, where he spent most of his artistic career. A pioneer of multimedia art in Britain through his multiple-screen projections and raucous performances, Keen’s experimental films (available as a BFI DVD box-set) are shot through with surrealist imagery, anarchic wit and a love of popular culture. Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, until 24 February.

www.brighton-hove-rpm.org.uk

● Jane and Louise Wilson continue their obsession with architecture and ruins with ‘The Toxic Camera’, which surveys the abandoned city of Pirpyat 25 years on from the Chernobyl disaster. In addition to documenting the exclusion zone’s eerie, empty landscapes, the film also explores Ukrainian Vladimir Shevchenko’s ‘Chernobyl: A Chronicle of Difficult Weeks’, filmed only a few days after the explosion. (The toxic camera of the title is Shevchenko’s, which became so radioactive that it had to be buried.) Showing alongside is a contrasting film installation by the Wilsons, examining a sleek new Dubai hotel. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, until 27 January.

www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk



● Jonas Mekas’s multi-faceted career as a filmmaker, artist, poet and crusader for independent film finally gets the celebration it deserves with an exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, London, until 27 January, sampling moving images, poetry and sound works from his six-decade-long practice, as well as featuring a new film installation by the octogenarian. Throughout December and January, meanwhile, BFI Southbank devotes a season to Mekas, highlighting being his diary film ‘Walden’ and ‘Lost, Lost, Lost’, which reflects on the filmmaker’s early years in New York. Mekas himself (above) appears in conversation with Sandra Hebron on 6 December.

www.serpentinegallery.org/www.bfi.org.uk

SELF-MADE MEN

Is the tension between performance and identity the secret heart of cinematic storytelling?

By Brad Stevens

Over the last few years, I've frequently pondered Jacques Rivette's claim: "All films are about the theatre, there is no other subject... Because that is the subject of truth and lies, and there is no other in the cinema: it is necessarily a questioning about truth, with means that are necessarily untruthful... Taking [performance] as the subject of a film is being frank, so it must be done" (*Cahiers du cinéma* 204, September 1968). As anyone who follows my work – notably my book on Abel Ferrara and my *Sight & Sound* article on Woody Allen (April 2011) – will probably have realised, I've become increasingly focused on questions of performance and identity, a focus not limited to films dealing explicitly with theatrical activities. Any whodunnit will inevitably explore the extent to which external gestures can be interpreted as evidence of deeper truths, just as any film about the military will contrast 'genuine' behaviour with the kind required by a rigidly defined power structure. It might even be claimed that all films involving actors must in some way grapple with questions of performance, with performance as a theme.

Try an experiment: take any film you are thoroughly familiar with and ask yourself exactly how it defines performance in relation to identity. Chances are you will perceive things you had previously been unaware of. My first long piece of criticism was on Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (it appeared in Ian Cameron's *The Movie Book of the Western*), a film that, until recently, I thought I had analysed from every possible angle. Yet when I came to look at it again from the perspective of my interest in performance, I suddenly discovered fresh possibilities of interpretation. The film now seems to be concerned with the clash of two public performers: on the one hand, Billy's refusal to withdraw from his position as 'star player' and retreat into anonymity (even though he knows full well that this refusal will result in his death); on the other, Garrett's reluctance to play the role he has been cast in – that of Billy's killer. Seen from this perspective, Peckinpah's film is really about the relationship between stardom and stage fright, the many sequences wherein violent acts are played out before groups of attentive spectators being especially suggestive; but note also the early scene in which, as Garrett drinks with Billy, various members of Billy's gang slowly make their way into the bar, like an audience arriving at a theatrical event.

But it is not simply the presence of actors that makes cinema (and, of course, theatre) so susceptible to ruminations on 'performing'. Much of our most important literature also shares this concern. Take Joseph Conrad, who defines the 'self' as a performance which must



Bar-room theatre: Billy's gang assemble like an audience in 'Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid'

be maintained by an act of will, and whose protagonists attempt to become what they are perceived (or wish to be perceived) as being, shaping their identities like actors desperate to please an audience. Consider Conrad's novel *Victory*, in which Heyst proclaims the value of "appearances – what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can't have better. You can't have anything else." Alma says to him: "If you were to stop thinking of me, I shouldn't be in the world at all" – a dilemma shared by the heroine of *Freya of the Seven Isles*, "vanquished in her struggle with three men's absurdities, and coming at last to doubt her own self", and *Nostromo*'s Decoud, who "after three days of waiting for the sight of some human face... caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own individuality". Consider Nostromo himself, who declares: "It concerns me to keep on being what I am, every day alike," and insists that "the caballeros... shall learn I am just the man they take me for". Or Razumov of *Under Western Eyes*, whose name "was the mere label of a solitary individuality". Or *The Secret Sharer*'s narrator, who wonders "how far I should turn out to be faithful to that ideal conception of one's personality every man sets up for himself secretly" – a problem shared with Lord Jim, impelled to retreat from 'civilisation' by the destruction of his self-image.

Yet these characters keep splitting, fracturing, doubling, as if the sheer effort needed to maintain a coherent identity were enough to make that identity seem contrived, creating a space for those doppelgangers in which Conrad's oeuvre is so rich: Gentleman Brown in *Lord Jim*, Mr Brown in *Victory*, Leggatt in *The Secret Sharer* and, of course, in *Heart of Darkness* (a novella that explores the apparent gap between seeming and being), Kurtz – of whom Marlow is informed: "The same people who sent him specially also recommended you." In the course of his journey upriver, Marlow encounters a series of individuals who have carefully constructed their own personas – and whom he perceives as blatantly artificial, culminating in the Russian Harlequin, the most

'Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid' is about public performance – the relationship between stardom versus stage fright

fantastically artificial of them all. Beyond the Harlequin lies Kurtz, the man who has rejected all 'merely' superficial definitions of self (what Marlow calls "the mere show"). Whereas Melville's Captain Ahab desired to "strike through the mask" separating pretence from truth ("All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks... Sometimes I think there's nought beyond. But 'tis enough"), Kurtz has actually peered behind the mask, and discovered – "The horror! The horror!" – that there is indeed 'nought beyond'.

Unless we subscribe to religious beliefs in an unchanging 'soul' that defines the 'truth' of what we are and to which our actions can be solipsistically referred, we must acknowledge that our 'self' exists only to the extent that it is revealed in the course of performative interactions with other individuals. In this we are like actors who, in the absence of a screenplay, are required to constantly improvise.

Yet, pace Kurtz, this should be a cause for celebration since it suggests that – rather than helpless victims of fate, destiny or Wellesian 'character' – we are actually creative beings capable of inventing and reinventing ourselves from moment to moment. To insist on living according to a preconceived plan is to deny the evidence of life as flux, an idea beautifully conveyed by the opening sequence of Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1961), in which a smooth role-player, James Mason's Humbert, confronts a rough improviser, Peter Sellers's Quilty (a Conradian doppelganger), who refuses to respect Humbert's rigid 'screenplay', instead using it as the springboard for a series of comic riffs in which identities are taken up and abandoned with bewildering rapidity. ☀

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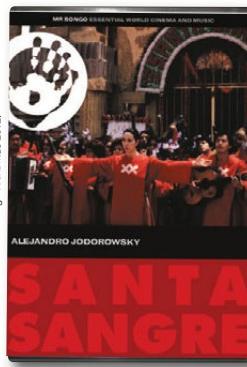
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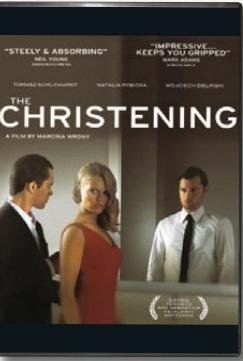


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PUMP DOWN THE VOLUME

Documentaries about music tend to favour the sweeping narrative, but sometimes specifics tell a more interesting tale

By Frances Morgan

Sometimes I watch things that I know will irritate me, like the Conservative Party Conference or *(500) Days of Summer*. Documentary films about music shouldn't fall into that category but too often they do, with complex histories of musicians and their work smoothed into bland narrative arcs that reinforce the clichés of rock fictions like *Almost Famous* – even if they're not about rock music – and leave no space for contrary points of view or unlikely currents of influence. Granted, trying to turn the life of a musician or evolution of a genre into 120 minutes of neat, watchable film is no easy task, even before you factor in budget, access, too much material or not enough, and the tendency of even the most charismatic talking-head interviewee to revert to epithets like 'genius' or 'truly original' when describing their subject. But when a film drills down into the process of making music – from composing and playing to the logistics of putting it out into the world – a story can emerge much more subtly, and it is often a richer one.

Musicians themselves are not always the most fascinating people, nor the most appealing, and this, I think, is where the rock hagiography fails hardest. For me, the story of Harry Nilsson is about songs and songwriting – both his own compositions and the two cover versions that made him famous. John Scheinfeld's 2006 film *Who Is Harry Nilsson (And Why Is Everybody Talkin' About Him?)* – ominously retitled *The Missing Beatle* for UK TV – nods to the intricate, harmony-laden gems fashioned by Nilsson but pays more heed to his friendship with John Lennon, one that arose out of mutual admiration but was also built around an enduring relationship with alcohol. Once addiction rather than art is the driving force of a story, the only way is down, via busted marriages and blown vocal cords, and Scheinfeld follows the inevitable long decline assiduously. A more interesting route could have been through the American music with which The Beatles did indeed have a significant relationship, just as contemporaries like The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson formulated their own baroque pop in response to the British invasion. With his apprenticeship with Phil Spector, appearance on *Midnight Cowboy's* soundtrack and songs performed by The Monkees, Nilsson is someone through whom the story of a very American pop psychedelia – Tin Pan Alley-trained and multi-tracked into infinity, yet often deeply strange – could be told.

The studio has been, at least for the last 50-odd years, the site of many of pop music's narratives and dramas – arguably more than 'the road'. A glimpse into the recording sessions for Scott Walker's *The Drift* album in *30 Century Man* (2006), while carefully mediated, tells you as much about the elusive singer's



Fine tuning: Scott Walker in '30 Century Man'

working methods as the guarded interviews he gives in the film. The best interviewees are not Walker's famous fans but orchestral arrangers Angela Morley and Phil Sheppard.

But one of the last decade's most thought-provoking and funny music films, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinovksy's *Metallica Some Kind of Monster* (2004), cautions against buying too heavily into the myth of the studio. The film follows heavy-metal band Metallica through the making of a new recording, a feat achieved at huge cost to the band's label and management as the band bicker, make up, employ a group therapist, lose and gain a bassist and eventually produce the *Saint Anger* album. As the cost would be even greater were this global cash cow to suddenly stop producing altogether, a new garage-style studio is set up at the start of the film, in which Metallica try and reclaim their old camaraderie – an exercise in *faux* authenticity doomed to failure (they eventually relocate to a more conventional space). *Some Kind of Monster* captures the vanity, venality and infantilising effect of major-label stardom through sharply observed, often mundane details of life not only in the spotlight but in meeting rooms and life-coaching sessions, not to mention an auction of drummer Lars Ulrich's cannily amassed art collection. Nothing quite like it has been made since, although BBC4 recently presented a compulsively watchable, albeit far less caustic, portrait of

The studio has been the site of many of pop's narratives and dramas – arguably more than 'the road'



'Some Kind of Monster'

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

the technical operation behind Iron Maiden in *Behind the Beast*. Again, process doesn't obscure the story; rather, it unlocks it.

If grand narratives should be avoided when profiling an artist or band, scenes, genres and movements could also benefit from a more microcosmic approach. Earlier this year *Blank City* was a worthy attempt to chronicle New York's 1970s No Wave movement, which encompassed not only music but visual art and film. With a cast including Jim Jarmusch, Thurston Moore, Lydia Lunch, Vivienne Dick and many more, backed by snippets of musical material from countless bands, no one could accuse director Celine Danhier of not knowing her subject. But the effect of this archival pile-up is again to impose a kind of neat, bland order on unruly subject-matter. Stories cannot be told at length; works can be named but not analysed. Formerly polemical voices are reduced to old-punk soundbites about gentrification, celebrity culture, the death of DIY and how the drugs were better back then. No Wave's unveiling of the 'ugly truth' that Lydia Lunch espouses in a typically hyperbolic interview only breaks through the film's carapace occasionally, in short bursts of archive footage by Nick Zedd et al that still bubble with angry, absurdist vitality.

Documentaries about a city's music seem duty-bound to provide broad sweeps, a kind of 'best of' compilation approach that reinforces narratives of contrast, sudden change and year-zeros. But anyone who lives in a city knows that urban life doesn't work like that: stories unfold through characters like *Tape Crackers'* Michael Finch, who keeps a vast archive of cassette recordings from London's pirate radio stations, or around record shops like the one documented in Jeanie Finlay's *Sound It Out*. Meanwhile, hyperlocal scenes document themselves in ways that will never reach a cinema screen: in the mid-2000s, East London's grime explosion was facilitated but also narrated by self-made DVDs; now, YouTube is the place to find short films about marginalised music subcultures.

In the same way that Bloomsbury's 33½ series of books take one album and trace its reverberations out into history and society, perhaps music documentarists need to start small, whether with an album, a mixtape, a venue, a machine or even just a sound, listening in closely before going for the bigger picture. ☀



'Blank City'

Early Dickens adaptations and a forgotten Ukrainian star head the bill at Pordenone's silent-cinema festival



The eyes have it: Anna Sten in 'Provokator'

By Geoff Brown
I liked the frankness of the intertitle in the Danish version of 'Great Expectations', advising us that eight years were going to pass by in seconds. And so it came to pass, as it did in many other films in the lively 31st edition of Pordenone's Le Giornate del Cinema Muto. The festival's major commemoration of the Dickens centenary gave us ten programmes of silent adaptations from England, America and Europe, almost all chopped and corseted from doorstopper novels.

Some lasted over two hours; the earliest, George Albert Smith's dream-like tableau 'The Death of Poor Joe' (circa 1900), lasted just over a minute. Whatever their length, even the festival's Dickens fanatics couldn't claim that these films generally offered cinematic magnificence. The Danish versions made by Nordisk in the early 1920s by A.W. Sandberg soared higher than most, boasting atmospheric settings and performances that successfully moved most of the characters beyond puppets and caricatures. Lower down, audiences could at least have fun compiling a list of gestures imported from Victorian theatre: the servile stoop; the greedily rubbed hands; the outstretched arm that said, "Go and never darken my door again." And in Sir John Martin-Harvey's Sydney Carton (in 'The Only Way'; Herbert Wilcox's stodgy 1926 take on 'A Tale of Two Cities') we saw star charisma at its most potent. One look from those dark, wistful eyes and I was putty in his hands.

If the Dickens films stuck largely to literary and theatrical traditions, pure cinema fireworks erupted elsewhere, most dazzlingly in Pudovkin's rarely seen 'A Simple Case'; a troubled production started in 1929 and subsequently 'improved' after initial audience bewilderment. You couldn't mistake the Soviet bromides, best encapsulated in the shots of euphoric youths bound for what the intertitle called "sunlit collective farm fields". The story, concerning the adultery of a hero of the revolution, brought its own problems. But every blight was swept aside by the staggering experimental effusions of Pudovkin and his camera team, designed to penetrate the characters' emotions and psychology. Eisenstein's montage in 'Battleship Potemkin' seems prehistoric compared to the whirlwind of images here, sometimes sufficiently hectic to need a warning about epileptic fits. Monumental facial close-ups, juddering camerawork simulating machine-gun fire, fruit ripening and shrivelling in fast motion – seen first thing on a Sunday morning, this was a film so visceral in impact that it seemed to slice off the top of your head.

Dovzhenko's 'Zvenigorod' (1927) contained spottier visual attractions, embedded in a profoundly obscure narrative. Clearer Soviet delights arrived in a survey of films featuring Anna Sten, the Ukrainian actress now most

famous for Sam Goldwyn's failed attempt to launch her as a Hollywood exotic to rival Garbo and Dietrich in the 1930s. Most of Pordenone's selection showed her as she was before the image-makers got to work. A gifted, versatile actress with big almond eyes, a modern urban look and a special gift for projecting volatility, she sparkled as the star attraction in Boris Barnet's comedy 'The Girl with the Hat Box' (1927) and easily survived the intense close-ups of Yevgeni Chervyakov's slice-of-life drama 'My Son' (1928), a film recently uncovered in Argentina and only available at the festival on a lopsided DVD. Even if her part was smallish, as in Viktor Turin's 'Provokator', Sten kept you keen to see what those eyes, that chin and that slightly up-turned nose would do next.

Day after day, surprises and revelations arrived. Méliès's 'Adventures of Robinson Crusoe' (1902) came back from the dead. Two German films of the 1920s – Leo Mittler's neglected realist classic 'Jenseits der Strasse' and a strong adaptation of Gerhart Hauptmann's play 'Die Weber' – made new friends, helped by superlative musical accompaniments from Stephen Horne and Günter A. Buchwald. John Sweeney, meanwhile, worked wonders accompanying 'Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre', a programme of coloured performance films shot with synchronised sound in 1900 for the Paris Exposition Universelle. With the exception of the eccentric comic Little Tich, most of the personalities on show survived only as butterflies pinned in a display case: interesting to look at but not alive. Even so, this was a luxury example of archival retrieval.

Plainer but more affecting pleasures came from 'The Skipper's Wooing' and other British comedies adapted by Manning Haynes and Lydia Hayward in the early 1920s from W.W. Jacobs's short stories. Individual titles had been previously unearthed at the British Silent Film Festival, but it was a joy to find an international audience responding so warmly to their amiable humour and visual sheen. If the Dickens films contained too much plot, these got by on a wisp and a twist. How pleasant, though, to putter with their sailor characters round the Kent coast, enjoying human foibles and a picturesquely vanished world. Like Oliver Twist, I wanted more. ☀

DEATH TO EVERYONE

Thierry Zéno's *Des Morts*, a 1979 Belgian documentary that looks unblinkingly at the way we die, is ready for a second life

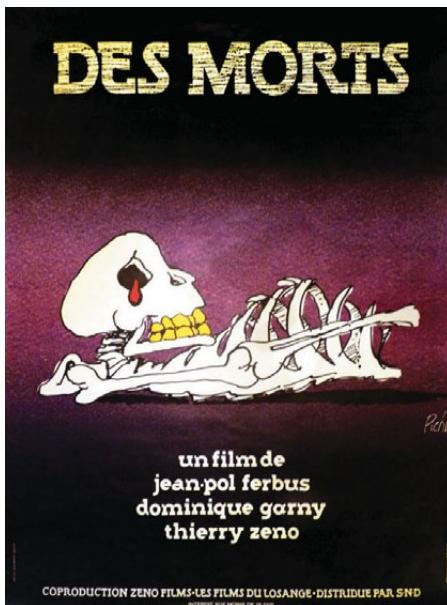
By Nick Pinkerton

A 1979 documentary exploring the boundary between here and hereafter, presenting and counterposing a variety of cross-cultural funeral rituals, the Belgian film *Des Morts* is a major work of thanatological cinema. But despite its highbrow pedigree – it was a co-production with Margaret Ménégoy's Eric Rohmer-affiliated Les Films du Losange – if the film comes up at all today, it's shackled to the loaded, pejorative category of 'shockumentary'. The packaging on my 2000 VHS release from Woodhaven Entertainment inauspiciously promises "graphic depictions of shocking practices, nudity and violence", while the feature presentation is preceded by a trailer for 1964's *Kwaheri* ("meaning 'Fire of Puberty'"), in which ritually scarified African bosoms are freely ogled. *Des Morts* has since had a cheapskate DVD transfer with no notable improvement of image or sound quality. Those in the know recommend the Japanese Toho Video VHS.

Yet in 1980 *Des Morts* could play a programme of recent Belgian cinema at New York's Museum of Modern Art, alongside films by Chantal Akerman. J. Hoberman praised it in *The Village Voice*; Amos Vogel, writing in *Film Comment*, compared it to Stan Brakhage's 1971 *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* and suggested director Thierry Zéno "must be celebrated as a pioneer and is in danger of being written out of 'official' film history". (See 'What the Papers Said', right, for more contemporary reviews.)

Clairvoyant as ever in this prediction, Vogel, who called death "the one last taboo in cinema", died this April – as, one day, I will, you will and everyone involved in *Des Morts* will. While time remains, then, let us give due credit to Zéno, Jean-Pol Ferbus and Dominique Garny – all credited as directors of *Des Morts*. (Only Zéno, however, has additional directing credits, including 1974's *Wedding Trough/Vase de Noces*, a portrait of medieval squalor and depravity that gained a degree of infamy as *The Pig Fucking Movie*, and something from 1978 called *Death in California, a Gentle Exit*, for which there is no existing reference outside the none-too-recently updated homepage of Zéno Films.)

Des Morts begins with an American mortician in a crisp white lab coat grooming a dead body – the first of many – cleaning the hands with the intent efficiency of a trained manicurist. Alain Pierre's electronic dirge scores the scene, one of the few instances of non-diegetic music in an otherwise stark, undecorated film that also dispenses with the master-of-ceremonies narration usually associated with shockumentaries, making its rhetorical points through editing instead. Pierre's synths give way to dolorous chanting and *khene* mouth-organs as we leave the secretive rites of the embalming ritual for a public ceremony in



The shock of the naughty exhibitionist is very different from the shock that results from striking at the heart of a subject

mountainous northern Thailand, where a Hmong family is seen mourning its late matriarch over a number of days preceding her burial, as the features of the deceased swell, darken and distort for all to see like rotting fruit.

"A person who has just been pronounced dead is very little different from that same person five, ten or 15 seconds earlier, when he was presumably alive," the operator of a Los Angeles cryogenics facility – practised in selling denial of the inevitable – blithely explains later; his statement is followed by a hard cut to a crumpled, sodden, unmistakably dead corpse splayed on a Tibetan *ghat*, feet dragging in the water. Another sort of modern immortality is represented by the videotaped image of a man who died of liver cancer in 1974, seen discussing his own impending end, his commentary commented on by his widow in turn. ("Every time I see this film, I am very happy to see Manny. It brings him back to me for another hour.") *Des Morts* visits six countries and three

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

"Better than shock therapy for snapping an acute depression. More than any musical you'd care to name, 'Des Morts' makes you want to live, live, live and keep on living."

J. Hoberman, 'The Village Voice'

"['Des Morts' is an] austere masterpiece [that] compels us to stare into the face of death, our unacknowledged deity and implacable enemy."

Amos Vogel, 'Film Comment'

continents. We see funeral processions wending their way towards village cemeteries in Zéno's native Wallonia and theatrical ululation at a South Korean wake. (Bong Joonho's 2006 *The Host* has some fun with this demonstrative tradition.) In the Mexican countryside, tolling church bells summon back the souls of the departed on *Día de los Muertos*, matadors deliver fatal *estocadas* to bulls and a mariachi band addresses a song to "baldlady" death. (Beginning in 1984, Zéno would live among and document the Tzotziles tribe of Mexico and their Zapatista Army of National Liberation, resulting in his 1995-97 film *jYa basta! Le cri des sans-visage*.) Time and again, intimate traditional cleansing ceremonies are contrasted with impersonal modern methods, public Buddhist cremations with the industrial disposal of a corpse in a cardboard coffin – a corpse we see bubble, hiss and crackle before our eyes.

By exposing its backstage workings, *Des Morts* violates the sanitising conspiracy of the mortuary industry: a private pilot explains his bulk business of sprinkling cremated remains over the San Francisco Bay; a funeral director gives a guided tour of luxury coffins while, behind the scenes, we see dead meat perfunctorily sutured, a corpse's face 'cosmetised' for viewing. But if the filmmakers' initial schematic plan was to establish a binary dichotomy reiterating the Jessica Mitford/Evelyn Waugh line of thought deplored "the American Way of Death", it was complicated by the material they gathered and their evident empathy. A second Thai funeral conducted according to Buddhist rites suggests discrepancies of tradition (and class) within the country, perplexing the simplistic East/West contrast. And, outside the mortuary business, American interviewees – including elderly trailer-park residents and muscular-dystrophy sufferers – are seen discussing death in clear-eyed and pragmatic terms.

Hospital visits such as those to the multiple-sclerosis ward allow the filmmakers to come to the very threshold of mortality. In a Mexico City emergency room, a man assaulted outside his mother's funeral, his torso perforated with multiple stab wounds, is sewn back together. As he discusses his ordeal, his neighbour in an adjacent bed struggles and dies. Were it not for the unmistakable veracity of the footage, one would be tempted to dismiss such happenstance as a staged *Faces of Death*-style hoax.

There is a great difference, however, between the shock of the naughty exhibitionist and the shock that results from striking straight at the heart of a subject. If the works of Austrians Michael Glawogger and Ulrich Seidl – globe-trotting films taking in humanity in all of its startling permutations – or Frederick Wiseman's *in extremis* 1989 *Near Death* can be rightly regarded as art, it is not enough to dismiss as 'shockumentary' the 1970s output of the likes of Jacopetti, Prosperi, the Castiglioni brothers and (especially) Zéno. As much as any film, *Des Morts* seriously, serenely addresses a subject that concerns us all, whether we'd care to admit it or not. ☀

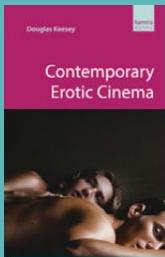
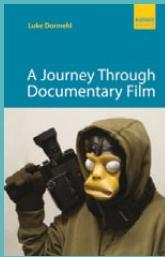
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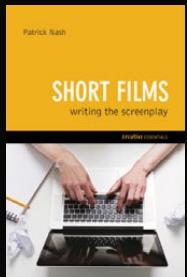
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POINT OF VIEW

CRIMES AGAINST THE GRAIN

The finishing process for most new films, and the digital clean-up of old films, is now a software realm where technicians enjoy unprecedented control over every single image characteristic. With no best-practice manuals or industry guidelines to follow, some users of these powerful digital tools are engaged in what resembles a 'black art' – with varying outcomes



Fig 1

By Nick Wrigley

Over the last few years, I've become very aware of how the natural appearance of filmed images – at the cinema and in the home – is often being detrimentally altered by digital processes. Since the turn of the new millennium, quantum leaps in powerful technology have brought about major changes to how films are produced, distributed and restored. The emergence of an initial High Definition (HD) plateau of 1080p24 (1920 x 1080 pixels displayed at 24 frames per second or fps) is now delivered via TV broadcasts, internet downloadsstreams and Blu-ray discs. There has been a huge shift towards, and reliance upon, the creation of a Digital Intermediate (DI) master as the lynchpin source (the digital 'negative') of all end-user formats a film company may require. The first Hollywood film to have a full DI was *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) and the first European

film was *Chicken Run* (2000). Any errors or bad practice in the creation of this new HD master will now become part of the film in all its forms and stay with it for decades unless rectified.

The new digital tools are capable of much astonishing work when handled with care, but in this exciting playground of infinite possibilities there's always the danger that something gets left behind – and it's usually natural film grain. Perceived by those unfamiliar with viewing or handling film as something akin to 'noise' or even 'dirt', film grain is considered by some to be the

Film grain is considered by some to be the undesirable detritus of a dated technology, something to be 'improved'

undesirable detritus of a dated technology, something to be 'improved' by digital tools. This often involves the significant reduction or outright removal of film grain, replacing it with something smoother, gauzier, more 'clean'. This popular misconception – particularly strong among those brought up with pristine digital Pixar animations and the sterility of modern HD videogame graphics – became endemic a few years ago when grain-free, digitally scrubbed-smooth HD masters began appearing on Blu-ray (major-label discs of *Casablanca*, *Patton* and *Spartacus* spring to mind).

For the record, film grain is a perceived optical effect created by enough visible light (photon particles) hitting clumps of silver halide grains or crystals in the emulsion of photographic film. Different types of film stock contain varying levels of detail due to the size and distribution of these fundamental particles

throughout the emulsion. Once footage has been shot, each frame of film contains a slightly different grain structure to the next, due to the arrangement of particles being unique in each frame. In motion (typically 24fps), the effect of moving film grain enables us to identify objects, reflections, depth, colours and everything else that is in front of the camera lens. The molecular structure constantly changes from frame to frame and this is what gives film its distinct patina and character (see Figs 2 & 3).

I believe that digital technology should represent a film's original grain structure as accurately as possible. Unfortunately, film grain causes a major problem for restricted formats such as TV broadcasts and internet downloads because to encode detailed film grain at a healthy bitrate (the amount of data that can be processed per second) requires considerable storage space – certainly more than grain-free footage, which has less information to encode. TV companies prefer encodes with little or no grain so the bitrate of their content can be kept low for their limited channel bandwidth and isn't seen to struggle with their choked compression allowances (the smaller the bitrate, the tighter the bandwidth, the more channels can fit into the spectrum). Decisions made decades ago about digital TV bandwidth and the number of channels that may comfortably fit in the available electromagnetic spectrum have historically taken little account of film grain or the increased bitrate requirements of healthily grained 1080p encodes. This has resulted in some film masters being significantly 'de-grained' for broadcast. If this practice were restricted only to broadcasts, it might be viewed as an unfortunate result of the limits of current broadcasting restrictions, but the problem has become more widespread.

To digitally represent film as faithfully as possible – to fully respect the nature of the original image – requires full capture of the grain structure, but because of these restrictions at the bottom of the digital food chain, an increasing number of companies are choosing to simplify everything by creating one master. Drained of its film grain, this master is then used to service all their digital outcomes. It should go without saying that if grain exists in a film originally, the finished digital master format (the DI) should exhibit healthy grain also, as should the finished Blu-ray and digital cinema package (DCP), both of which can handle grain well because their bitrates and technical specification allow it to flourish if necessary.

For many, the most upsetting consequence of all this is the damage being done to classic films on Blu-ray. Either out of ignorance or some misguided attempt to make older films more relevant to the 'PlayStation generation', some companies have chosen to modernise the look of their films by minimising the grain and artificially 'sharpening' the image through digital processing (see Fig 1). The look achieved may be attractive to some, but it no longer resembles film. Talking to film restorers and digital clean-up experts about these issues reveals great dismay when shoddy

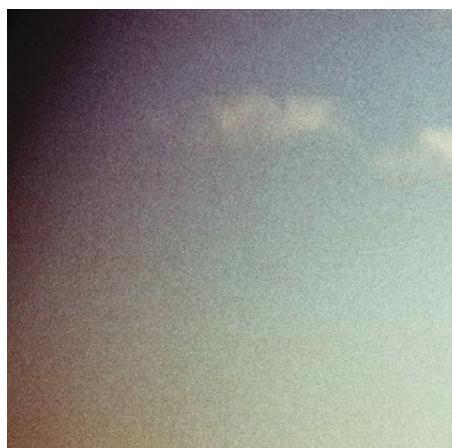


Fig 2



Fig 3

digital work is repeatedly passed off as 'cutting edge'. Some of these 'restorations' often go largely unnoticed by the general viewing public. Ultimately, such digital crimes are not only a disservice to the film and its makers but also to the distributor and the restoration facility responsible, damaging the public perception of Blu-ray and DCP in the process.

This impulse to make images smoother and shinier can take many forms, such as attempts to reconfigure title sequences of older films for new HD masters where presumably a normal optical sequence was deemed easier to rebuild from scratch than to restore (the superimposition of text over a moving image at the beginning of Hitchcock's *Frenzy* for its Blu-ray release is one example; see page 110 for review). The new Hammer/StudioCanal Blu-ray of Terence Fisher's *The Devil Rides Out* (1967) contains entirely new 2012 CGI special effects, not as an optional extra but replacing original scenes, George Lucas revisionist style, and bringing into question a film distributor's moral and ethical obligation to present a film faithfully, regardless of whether the director (who died in 1980) was unhappy with the original FX work or not. How are audiences to learn from the films of the past when they're made unavailable, replaced by

Fig 1

A detail of a Blu-ray grab from the 2011 French Blu-ray of 'Le Samouraï' (Melville, 1967), demonstrating the undesirable 'stippled watercolour' look that heavy-handed digital processing can introduce.

Fig 2

A detail of a 35mm frame containing natural film grain. The next frame in this 'grainy' sequence would look similar, but the arrangement of grain differs. In motion, the footage has movement and looks alive.

Fig 3

The same shot but scrubbed of grain. The next frame in this 'smooth' sequence would look almost identical. In motion, the footage appears static, giving the impression of having been accidentally paused.

sexed-up digital approximations? Practices such as these demonstrate a contempt for film history and film audiences. StudioCanal's wildly inconsistent work on Blu-rays of *Peeping Tom* and *Don't Look Now* contrasts with their stellar discs of *La Grande Illusion* and *Le Quai des brumes*, highlighting just how spectacularly hit-and-miss digital restoration work can be, even from the same label.

It's difficult to focus on film-grain problems when there are so many other related issues. For example, an entire article could be devoted to the confused debacle surrounding William Friedkin's work on the first Blu-ray of *The French Connection*. Also of considerable concern are the detrimental default factory settings with which much consumer technology arrives – sharpness controls fully ramped when they should be zero, unhelpful MotionFlow/PureMotion-type frame interpolation that tries to mimic high frame-rates and blinding brightness/backlit settings – worthy of much discussion, because they can completely unravel all the good work done on an HD master when displayed poorly at home.

Knowing that a poor restoration will be seeded to multiple other formats (including DCP) for decades to come makes the consequences of cack-handed revisionist meddling all the more troublesome. Conversely, it's all the more rewarding when a large studio such as Warner Bros (USA) realises the error of its (2008) ways and issues a beautiful new 2012 Blu-ray of *Casablanca* with healthy grain. More similar upgrades are forthcoming from them. *The Red Shoes* (Film Foundation), *Lawrence of Arabia* (Sony), *Blackmail* (BFI) and *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Masters of Cinema) serve as recent successful case studies of difficult restorations guided safely through the digital quagmire.

With so much work required for a full restoration, with so much at stake and with so many costly restorations being undertaken worldwide, it would perhaps be helpful for a global organisation to step forward and advise on best-practice standards. If restoration failures are more widely discussed, they might eventually disappear. The fact that all things photochemical are experiencing their final death rattle is all the more reason to make sure we don't forget what film is supposed to look like. ☀

READERS' LETTERS

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Shedding light on 'Light'

It seems amazing that a serious film critic could misunderstand a film as completely as Tony Rayns does in his review of *Nostalgia for the Light* (*S&S*, August). Rayns objects to the correlations made in the film between historical recovery and archaeological and astronomical investigation, saying "the metaphor just doesn't stand up". Surely, however, no metaphor is intended; the argument of the film is that there is continuity between these forms of investigation, which all respond to our need to exist in a present which – as the film powerfully indicates – does not exist. To dismiss such a contention as "moribund" insults the historical memory of those who suffered under Pinochet and does no more than bear witness to Rayns's own lack of imaginative empathy. Thanks to *S&S* for at least providing a corrective to this nonsense with a far more nuanced feature article on this fine film ('Desert of the Disappeared', *S&S*, August).

Michael Richardson, London

Back to the source

In 'Bradlands' (*S&S*, October) Brad Stevens refers to a dialogue concerning Michael Powell's *The Queen's Guards* that he had had post-screening via email with Yusef Sayed. In the spirit of the content of Mr Stevens's article, I thought it worth mentioning that Mr Sayed developed his discourse on the film significantly in a several-thousand-word article on *The Queen's Guards* for the website Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second.

**Adam Batty, editor-in-chief,
Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second**

No blues

As I am sure Sally Potter will tell you, 'The Man I Love' is not a blues, as Sophie Mayer suggests ('Bomb Culture', *S&S*, November) – it's an AABA 32-bar pop song. And, while on the subject of film critics misappropriating musical terms, a riff is not an improvisation – it's a repeated phrase.

Steve Beresford, London

'Looper' blooper

I was pleased to read Sophie Mayer's less than enthusiastic review of *Looper* (*S&S*, November), a film welcomed by almost all critics as maintaining an honourable tradition of intelligent science fiction in the cinema. It seems to me to have more in common with Stallone 'shoot 'em up' movies than with *Blade Runner*, *Twelve Monkeys* or *La Jetée*. Its central conceit is that "Loopers" exist in the future because murder in the high-surveillance "future future" is impossible. In our brief glimpse of the future future, however, heavy weaponry is as much in evidence as in the earlier times, and Bruce Willis's wife is killed in broad daylight with the casual brutality expected from villains in, say, a Chuck Norris movie. The macguffin here is not simply

LETTER OF THE MONTH ONE MORE SHOT OF MOONSHINE



In his otherwise comprehensive survey of the 'moonshine' subgenre ('The Moonshine Boys', *S&S*, October), Michael Atkinson claims it has produced "no notable auteur or signature work" – neglecting John Frankenheimer's 'I Walk the Line' (1970, above).

Though the film is marred by miscast movie star Gregory Peck as a small-town sheriff (Ralph Meeker, who plays his moonshining adversary, would have been more authentic), Jean-Pierre Coursodon, writing on

Frankenheimer in his book 'American Directors', cites the film as evidence of "a maturity, a deepening sensitivity that place him among the foremost directors of his generation". And David Thomson (in his 'Biographical Dictionary of Film' entry on Frankenheimer) calls it "a gradual rural tragedy, founded in hopeless infatuation, and inspired by one of Tuesday Weld's best performances". All this, and a musical score by Johnny Cash.

D. Kraft, Los Angeles, USA

tenuous – the scene demonstrates that there is absolutely no need for Loopers.

The one interesting and original question – how would it feel if you were ordered to kill your future self? – is sidetracked once Paul Dano disappears from the story. We are left with a derivative slam-bang action thriller, well made in itself but of no more lasting merit than, say, *Taken* or *Man on Fire*.

Ray Jenkin, Cardiff

'Holy' observations

Just to add to Mark Hoare's "fallen angel" theory on Leos Carax's film *Holy Motors*, as espoused in his letter (*S&S*, November), I'm surprised no one has picked up on the relevance of the limousine's registration, "202 DXM 95", which features heavily in the film. The "202" can be phonetically taken as "de-scen-de" and the "DXM" – which also appears on M. Oscar's work folder – I would guess to mean "Deus eX Machina", an obvious echo of the film's title, *Holy Motors*.

As for the last two digits, I'm still working on those. "Id Est", perhaps?

Martin Green, Timperley

It's frankly laughable that my local picture house describes *Holy Motors* as "breaking the rules of cinema". That only reveals that 'independent cinema' is capable of the same grandiose claims as Hollywood ("M.

Oscar" – geddit?). To this writer it is just plain obvious that Carax had a bunch of ideas he didn't know what to do with, so slung them together in this entertaining ragbag.

While your commentators make interesting points about the film ('Film of 1000 faces' and 'Reviews', *S&S*, October), I'm surprised they don't note the most interesting and subtle of the vignettes: the father collecting his daughter from a party, threatening her with punishment not for being sexually active, but for being a wallflower. Surely this is a reversal of the social norm worthy of Buñuel?

Incidentally, I just read that "merde!" is used by French actors in the way British actors say "break a leg!"; interesting, in view of the director's claim that the film is about neither acting nor cinema.

Fair play, though. Carax has crafted exactly the kind of 'foreign' arthouse film the masses expect. Baffling, endlessly debatable – and with an erect penis.

Stephen Volk, Bradford-on-Avon

Additions and corrections

November p.91 *Elena*, Certificate 12A, 109m 15s, 9,832 ft +8 frames; p.86 The credits for *Frankenweenie* state 'In black and white' but it should be: 'In black and white and colour'; p.95 *Keep the Lights On*, Certificate 18, 102m 15s, 9,202 ft +8 frames; p.97 *On the Road*, Certificate 15, 124m 2s, 11,163 ft +0 frames; p.105 *Sister*, Certificate 15, 97m 27s, 8,770 ft +8 frames; p.108 *Tempest*, Certificate 12A, 76m 26s, 6,879 ft +0 frames

October p.100 *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, Certificate 15, 107m 4s, 9,635 ft +12 frames

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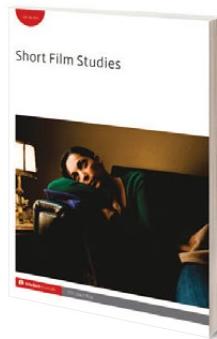
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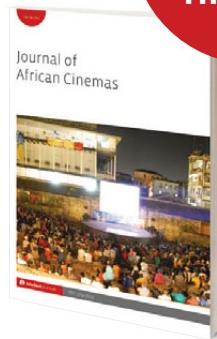
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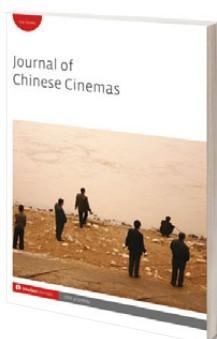
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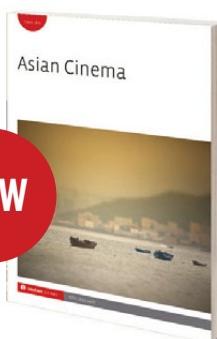


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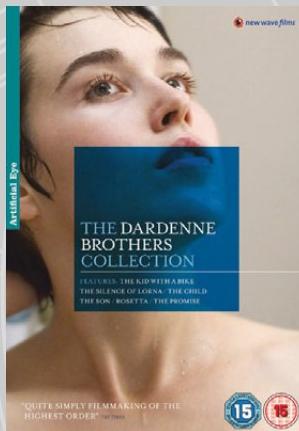
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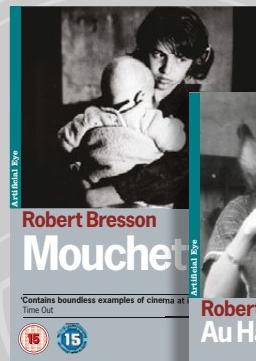
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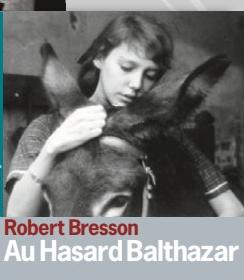


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Reviews



104 **Skyfall**

Much has Bond seen and known in his time, but almost none of his previous screen adventures have taken place in his native land. In Sam Mendes's Bond movie, dazzlingly shot by Roger Deakins, the wintry London and Scotland sequences stand out



78 Films of the month



86 Films



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Hostage to fortune: Ben Affleck as Tony Mendez, mingling with the crowds in Tehran in 'Argo'

Argo

USA 2012

Director: Ben Affleck

Certificate 15 120m 11s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Hollywood, of course, loves a story in which Hollywood itself plays a heroic role, and this fact-based rescue thriller is definitely one from the stranger-than-fiction file.

At the start of the 1980s, while the world's attention was focused on the 52 staff members held hostage by Islamic militants in Tehran's overrun US embassy building, a further six Americans, who'd escaped just in time, were secretly posing as 'house guests' in the residence of the Canadian ambassador. Going public with the story would have put their lives in danger, so the CIA was tasked with getting them back home – and 'exfiltration' expert Tony Mendez came up with the idea of creating a fake sci-fi movie project on a location-scouting visit to Iran, which could pass off the escapees as Canadian members of the crew. This was the era of the post-*Star Wars* knockoff, and actually it's not unfeasible to imagine *Argo*, the no-hoper screenplay picked

up by Mendez and his old Tinseltown pal John Chambers (another real-life individual, who won an honorary Oscar for his makeup work on the original *Planet of the Apes*), jostling for attention in a marketplace also turning out the likes of *Krull* and *Battle Beyond the Stars*.

What with the movie-biz angle, the ingenuity and heroism of the CIA and the chance to relish putting one over on Iran's Islamists, the material seems set to deliver an all-American, fist-pumping, crowd-pleasing rescue narrative. It's to the credit of director-star Ben Affleck and his production crew that they've turned out a movie which gets lots of laughs from its Beverly Hills in-jokery and delivers a genuine nail-biter of a finale, but does so while remaining impeccably responsible towards the historical motivations of both sides in the conflict.

Certainly the film celebrates the courage and resourcefulness of a subsequently decorated CIA agent, but it does this while finding room to underline the vital contribution of the real-life Canadian ambassador Ken Taylor (who put himself and his own staff at risk by giving refuge to the American escapees) and a presumably fictional Iranian housekeeper who's twigged the identity of the new arrivals in the household. Yes, it's the mad-but-true storyline and the expertly mounted suspense

that audiences may well take away with them, but Affleck also makes a point of opening with a contextualising montage, reminding US audiences in particular that the roots of the Iranian Islamic revolution can be traced to past American foreign policy. Before any of the story has gotten under way, viewers are treated to a potted history lesson recalling the CIA-backed overthrow of the democratically elected Mosaddegh government in 1953 for daring to nationalise the oil industry, and indeed the discontent caused in Iran by



Affleck, with Alan Arkin as Lester Siegel



The crazy-but-it-might-just-work conceit rubs up against an admirable refusal to paint the Iranian side as cartoon villains or fathomless Islamic other

and gloss. The high-tension opening assault on the US embassy sets out the scale of its ambitions in terms of an expansive historical verisimilitude, before a slightly more comic tone pokes fun at the befuddlement of State Department and CIA higher-ups, while the process of setting up the fake movie production brings in John Goodman's loyal industry cohort and Alan Arkin's wisecracking veteran schlock producer to fire out screenwriter Chris Terrio's best one-liners with hilarious aplomb.

The fun isn't allowed to take over, however, since the rescue mission itself is crisply executed as a straightforward suspense exercise, where the crazy-but-it-might-just-work conceit rubs up against an admirable refusal to paint the Iranian side as mere cartoon villains or fathomless Islamic other. We're provided with enough reminders of the Shah's reign of torture to give the revolutionary protests a readable basis, while the new regime's security services put up a reasonable show in their pursuit of the US officials, building to a final departure-lounge showdown that's by no means cut and dried.

Affleck's performance as Mendez is particularly well judged at this point: eye-to-eye with the sternest revolutionary guard, he's a man caught between hints of put-on bonhomie and a steely determination not to give the game away. Done up in a beard and hairdo harking back to 70s-vintage James Brolin, Affleck presents Mendez's unyielding can-do efficiency without a hint of overplaying or falling back on the salt-of-the-earth leading-man persona which undermined the otherwise sharp crime-pic moves in *The Town*. That said,

the somewhat perfunctory domestic asides here (estranged from wife and child, hitting the booze too frequently) highlight *Argo's* main flaw – a slightly glib level of characterisation on the American side, which struggles to personalise all the 'house guests', instead leaving the ever-reliable Scoot McNairy to soak up attention as the whiny naysayer who's also the only Farsi speaker. But with an array of real-life participants to weave into the fabric and the conflicting imperatives of exposition and pace to consider, perhaps some limitations are to be expected, and they don't impinge too forcefully on the film's global effectiveness.

Indeed, a significant part of the appeal here is the abiding impression that the filmmakers have gone that extra mile to do the job properly, from the impressive array of retro office equipment in the US embassy buildings and the conviction of the turbulent Tehran street scenes right down to little cameo moments, including Adrienne Barbeau as a faded starlet cast in the staged *Argo* reading at the Beverly Hills Hotel and director Rafi Pitts, no less, popping up as an Iranian consular staffer in Turkey. A pleasure too to see action sequences like the climactic airport showdown forged from the classical virtues of adept camera placement and sharp cutting, another merciful reminder (as indeed were the taut heist and car-chase set pieces in *The Town*) that Affleck the director owes nothing to Michael Bay's crass shaky-cam blitzing.

For all its astute detailing, though, *Argo* never forgets that it's populist entertainment, and in these days when the Hollywood landscape seems irrevocably divided between superhero CGI spectacle on the one hand and modest awards-baiting 'prestige' fare on the other, it's extremely cheering to see a film that defies those norms. In this instance, studio-scale resources and star appeal serve a product slick enough to send us smiling out of cinemas on a Saturday night, but with the substance to avoid insulting our intelligence in the process. S

subsequent decades of US support for the secular, western-friendly Shah, notwithstanding his dismal record on human rights.

While that sense of bringing a considered political overview to an essentially mainstream product has been a consistent thread for Affleck's fellow producers Grant Heslov and George Clooney in their previous endeavours (*Good Night and Good Luck*, *The Ides of March*), the overall attention to detail is also familiar from Affleck's other directorial outings *Gone Baby Gone* (2007) and *The Town* (2010), crime stories founded on a fully realised depiction of his native Boston as walk-through convincing as any Sidney Lumet New York movie you might care to mention. *Argo*, though, is a leap forward in scale and accomplishment, which may well surprise those who still perceive Affleck in terms of celebrity marriage and the glittery detritus of what might be termed the matinee-idol segment of his filmography. Some will never forgive him for the bottomless superficiality of Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* (2001), but it's certainly possible to trace developing skill in his trio of directorial feature credits – that Lumet reference is no cheap jest, by the way.

What's striking about the new film is the absolute assurance of its balance between grit

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Grant Heslov
Ben Affleck
George Clooney

Screenplay

Chris Terrio
Based on a selection from *The Master of Disguise* by Antonio J. Mendez and the Wired magazine article *The Great Escape* by Joshua Bearman

Director of Photography

Rodrigo Prieto

Edited by

William Goldenberg
Sharon Seymour

Music Composed & Conducted by

Alexandre Desplat
Jose Antonio Garcia

Costumes Designed by

Jacqueline West
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Entertainment Inc.

Production

Companies

Warner Bros.
Pictures presents in association with GK Films a Smokehouse Pictures production

Executive Producers

Jack O'Donnell
Alan Arkin
Lester Siegel
John Goodman
John Chambers
Victor Garber
Ken Taylor
Tate Donovan
Bob Anders
Clea DuVall

Film Extracts

Battle for the Planet of the Apes (1973)

Cast

Ben Affleck
Tony Mendez
Bryan Cranston
Jack O'Donnell
Alan Arkin
Lester Siegel
John Goodman
John Chambers
Victor Garber
Ken Taylor
Tate Donovan
Bob Anders
Clea DuVall

Production

Scoot McNairy

Joe Stafford
Rory Cochrane
Lee Schatz
Christopher Denham
Mark Lijek
Kerry Bishé
Kathy Stafford
Kyle Chandler

Distributor

Warner Bros.
Distributors (UK)
10,816 ft +8 frames

Iran, November 1979. Protesters mass outside the US embassy in Tehran demanding the return from America of the Shah, the country's ailing US-backed former dictator. Fifty-two staff members are taken hostage when the building is stormed, but six secretly escape through a side route and shelter in the Canadian ambassador's residence.

Sixty-nine days later, as the hostage crisis continues, the CIA is confounded by the task of extricating the six. Exfiltration specialist Tony Mendez comes up with a plan to pose as a film producer on a location-scouting mission, present the fugitives with fake Canadian passports and leave on a commercial flight. Enlisting the help of his friend John Chambers, a famed Hollywood makeup specialist, he teams up with initially sceptical

producer Lester Siegel to purchase a 'Star Wars'-style sci-fi script called 'Argo', which they launch to the trade press. Having established the credibility of the film project, Mendez enters Iran via Turkey. He is met with scepticism from the six fugitives, their mistrust intensifying after a near-riot during a location visit to the Tehran souk with a government official. By now the Iranian secret service is suspicious, and closes in on the Canadian ambassador's residence after Mendez and company have left for the airport, where doubtful guards call the bogus Hollywood production office and are thus convinced to let the travellers board their flight. The Americans' return home makes the news, but Mendez's contribution is not revealed until President Clinton declassifies the files in 1997.

The Hunt

Denmark/Sweden 2012
Director: Thomas Vinterberg
Certificate 15 115m 27s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab



The first point to make about Thomas Vinterberg's *The Hunt* is that its main character, who is accused of child abuse, is innocent.

This isn't giving away the ending – Lucas (Mads Mikkelsen) is as falsely accused as Spencer Tracy's character in Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936). Vinterberg isn't trying to make a nuanced and ambiguous drama in which the behaviour of the adult towards the kid is open to interpretation. The victim here is the man, not the child.

Scripted by Vinterberg with Tobias Lindholm, *The Hunt* is bravura filmmaking – lean, intense and very well acted. Even so, the plotting is a little crude: Vinterberg depicts a close-knit rural community in which the adults seemingly can't accept that a child is telling them lies, and in next to no time they are turning viciously against one of their own. Lucas has no means of defending himself, with former friends ready to shoot or lynch him.

After his international projects *It's All About*



Fair-weather friends: 'The Hunt'

Love (2003) and *Dear Wendy* (2004), Vinterberg re-embraced his local roots with the comedy *A Man Comes Home* (2008) and the drama *Submarino* (2010). *The Hunt* is again a pared-down story rooted in family life in a small Danish community. In spite of a blast of Van Morrison's 'Moondance' in the opening scenes (old friends swimming naked in the wilds), the film is made largely without music. And as in *Festen* (1998), Vinterberg uses handheld camera and natural light. Thankfully, despite its very dark subject-matter, the film is also leavened with plenty of gallows humour. This approach is summed up in one scene in which Lucas is returning to a friend's house after his arrest; he embraces his traumatised teenage son, who has stuck by him, and the friend yells out of the window, "Hey! If you fondle your kid, you'll go back to jail." This ability to introduce irony at even the film's most climactic moments ensures that Vinterberg steers clear of the sermonising which often blights issue-based movies.



Right: Lucas and son

Although *The Hunt* may seem like realist drama, the filmmakers also borrow from other genres, in particular horror and vigilante-style revenge thrillers. It's easy to be reminded of old Frankenstein movies in which pitchfork-wielding peasants chase the monster through forests, or even Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971), with its scenes of a mild-mannered academic caught up in a primal life-or-death battle against psychopathic Cornish villagers.

The casting is astute. Mikkelsen – the Bond villain crying blood in *Casino Royale*, the Viking warrior in *Valhalla Rising* and the doctor engaged in an illicit relationship with a queen in *A Royal Affair* – customarily plays the alpha-male type. Here he's a kindergarten teacher, a divorcee with a messy private life and low self-esteem – but at the same time, as played by Mikkelsen, he retains a sense of defiance and even a certain swagger. We root for him when he takes violent retribution against a supermarket worker who has been persecuting him, or when he stumbles into church for the Christmas Eve service. He has no doubts about his own innocence. Nor, however battered or isolated he is, does he fall prey to self-pity.

The film continually highlights how easily the seemingly civilised, rational inhabitants of the small town lose their moral bearings – and how irrational their behaviour is. They look and behave like social-democratic types, convinced of their own reason and common sense – but it takes very little to turn them into vigilantes. Almost as disturbing as the ease with which they use violence is the way they snap back into their old bourgeois habits afterwards. There's a wonderful moment when a character is headbutted; immediately after committing this act of violence, the aggressor punctiliously counts out the money to pay for his groceries. Scenes of domesticity are deliberately juxtaposed with far more primal and disturbing imagery – the very title of the film hints at an underlying savagery. And even before Lucas is accused of abuse, we see male bonding rituals (the naked swimming, the drinking, the hunting) that seem to belong to an older, more primitive world.

In interviews, Vinterberg has claimed (seemingly only partially tongue-in-cheek) that the film reflects a crisis in Scandinavian masculinity. There is certainly a gulf between the Lucas we see off duty, carousing with friends or hunting, and the browbeaten kindergarten worker helping the children in their toilet duties and being scolded by the headteacher. On one warped level, the accusations can be seen as benefiting him, since they give him an excuse to fight back. In his defiance, he reclaims his identity and becomes ever more macho, confronting his tormentors in the church and demanding that they look in his eyes (the inference is that they will find no guilt there). In these scenes,

Mikkelsen is playing the part in the same fatalistic way that he tackled the role of the warrior in *Valhalla Rising*.

The Hunt will inevitably be seen as a companion piece – or riposte – to the equally focused *Festen* (1998). In that film, a family patriarch is exposed as having sexually abused his children, and



The accused: Mads Mikkelsen as Lucas

Scenes of domesticity are deliberately juxtaposed with far more primal and disturbing imagery – the very title of the film hints at savagery

the drama hinges on his misbehaviour, for so long concealed, finally being brought out into the open at a family celebration. In *The Hunt*, the structure is reversed: there is no attempt by the community to conceal the alleged abuse, which is out in the open very early on, and the drama revolves instead around the hero's attempts to rebut the allegations.

We are told several times that Klara, the child who has accused Lucas, never lies, and the screenplay is deliberately noncommittal about her motives – she has seen a fleeting image of sex on an iPad. She's no villain and yet her behaviour is perplexing, and so is that of the adults around her, the experts and teachers who believe everything she tells them. Her father Theo (Thomas Bo Larsen) is Lucas's best friend but doesn't take very much convincing of his guilt. The ties in the community where Lucas lives seem at first to be extremely strong



Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Sisse Graum
Jørgensen

Morten Kauffmann

Scriptwriters

Thomas Vinterberg

Tobias Lindholm

Director of Photography

Charlotte Bruus

Christensen

Editors

Anne Østerud

Janus Billeskov

Jansen

Production Designer

Torben Stig Nielsen

Composer

Nikolaj Egelund

Sound Designers

Kristian Selin
Eidnes Anderson

Thomas Jæger

Costumes

Stine Gudmundsen-

Holmgreen

Production Companies

Zentropa

Entertainments 19

APS & Zentropa

International

Sweden AB

Film i Väst, Zentropa

Entertainments

with the support

from Det Danske

Filminstitut,

DR – Filmklubben,

Film i Väst, Zentropa

International Sweden
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from Det Danske

Filminstitut,

DR, Eurimages,

Nordisk Film &

TV Fond, Svenska

Filminstitutet, SVT

Produced by Zentropa

Entertainments 19

APS in co-production

with Film i Väst,

Zentropa International

Sweden

with the support

from Det Danske

Filminstitut,

DR – Filmklubben,

Eurimages,
Nordisk Film &

TV Fond, Svenska
Filminstitutet, SVT

With the support

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Cast

Mads Mikkelsen

Lucas

Thomas Bo Larsen

Theo

Annika Wedderkopp

Klara

Lasse Fogelström

Marcus

Susse Wold

Grethe
Anne Louise Hassing

Agnes
Lars Ranthe

Bruun
Alexandra Rapaport

Nadia
Sebastian Bull

Sarning
Torsten

Steen Ordell

Guldbrandsen
Lars T

Daniel Engstrup

Johan
Troels Thorsen

Bent

Dolby Digital

In Colour
Subtitles

Distributor

Arrow Films

10,390ft + 8 frames

Danish theatrical title

Jagten

Denmark, the present. A group of friends from a close-knit rural community swim naked in the wilds and then get drunk together. Among them is kindergarten teacher Lucas, who has recently split up from his wife and has had limited access to his teenage son Marcus. One day Lucas walks a young girl of four or five called Klara home. Klara's father Theo is one of his hunting companions and oldest friends. Some other children show Klara pornographic images on an iPad. Lucas finds a small present from Klara in his coat pocket, a drawing which appears to depict a couple kissing. She denies giving it to him and subsequently

makes allegations about his behaviour towards her to the headteacher. The headteacher is shocked by the sexual nature of what Klara describes and has Lucas suspended. The community begins to turn against Lucas. His son is attacked for standing up for him, his beloved dog is killed, and he is victimised brutally by former friends and neighbours. His new relationship with fellow teacher Nadja comes under pressure. Theo insists that Klara never tells lies. Much later, Klara appears to retract her accusation. Lucas is accepted back into the community, but on a hunting trip someone takes a pot shot at him with a rifle.

– the men have grown up together, they drink together, they go hunting together – yet on the basis of just a few words from a young girl, old loyalties are very quickly severed.

It is one of the paradoxes of recent Danish cinema that so many directors who made their names in the Dogme period in the late 1990s have turned out to have such mainstream sensibilities. Even when he was working under Dogme constraints, Vinterberg was the most accessible of directors. With *The Hunt*, he has taken very dark material and yet the tone, if not exactly breezy, isn't dour either. The style is disarming – after all, abuse of a child is one of the ultimate taboos – and the subject-matter alone is likely to put off some viewers. Others may take against Vinterberg's stance, in particular his insistence that the child isn't always innocent. The man falsely charged with child abuse is the modern equivalent of those wrongly accused witches in films and dramas such as *The Crucible* or *Day of Wrath*. The difference is that he fights back – and he has a sense of humour about his plight. Vinterberg tells Lucas's story with intensity and grim irony, and even throws in his trademark references to Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*. The result is a film that, in spite of its ambivalent coda, is far more uplifting than you would ever expect. **S**



Follow my leader: Jillian Bell, Rami Malek and Philip Seymour Hoffman in 'The Master'

The Master

USA 2012

Director: Paul Thomas Anderson

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

See Feature
on page 28

P.T. Anderson's *The Master* isn't just a divisive film – it's a divided film, a film of two portraits hung pendant. Like Anderson's last historical fiction, *There Will Be Blood* (2007), which centred on the grudge match between Daniel Day-Lewis's Daniel Plainview (commerce) and Paul Dano's Eli Sunday (religion), *The Master* is written around the jockeying juxtaposition of two American archetypes, a comparison revealing real divergences as well as a national family resemblance.

The first to be unveiled is Freddie Quell, played by Joaquin Phoenix. Quell, when we first meet him, is drawing pay from the navy, marking time on some Pacific island at the fag-end of World War II, spending the Best Years of His Life getting high on torpedo fuel, humping a woman made of sand for an appreciative audience of his mates, and pausing from macheteing coconuts to, we distinctly intuit from his screwed-up expression, contemplate chopping off some

fingers. Making no apparent progress in stuffing his id back into the bottle, Quell is unleashed on the stateside civilian population.

Landing a job as a studio photographer in an immaculate downtown department store, he swills developing fluid in the darkroom, a worm burrowed in the bright blooming rose of prosperity, memorialising the post-war cult of family life from which he's excluded. Quell keeps his thousand-yard squint fixed on a remote heartbreak which, in a game of give-and-take revelation and obfuscation – the film's signature manoeuvre – will eventually be 'explained' in a manner that doesn't seem like a satisfactory explanation at all. (This strategy of confounding extends to the visuals: *The Master* was shot in 65mm and is being projected, where possible, in 70mm – classically the trappings of an epic, but Anderson has essentially made a chamber drama, shot by DP Mihai Malaimare Jr with a stiflingly shallow depth of field.)

Freddie is a great character, redolent with associations, and Phoenix does urgent, erratic work here, making him the most extravagantly ruined screen drunk since James Dean's in *Giant* (1956). It's difficult not to bring up Dean, and the legacy of Method acting generally, when discussing Phoenix's performance, though specifically he seems to be channelling Dean's spiritual big brother Montgomery Clift – it's in the wiry, vexed black brows, the concave chest, akimbo arms and Ichabod Crane

elbows; it's even in Phoenix's harelip-ish scar and half-snarl, suggesting Clift's damaged, post-auto-accident incarnation.

Regarding influences, Phoenix has stated that Anderson directed him as homework to two non-fiction films: John Huston's 1946 report on the returning walking-wounded veterans *Let There Be Light*, and Lionel Rogosin's 1956 portrait of skid row's toppers *On the Bowery*, both essential documents of traumatised masculinity and opting-out of mid-century America. Quell receives his own directorial coaching, however, under the tutelage of Philip Seymour Hoffman's Lancaster Dodd, who'll guide his pupil through a number of 'processing' exercises to excavate past lives – exercises that resemble nothing so much as an acting-class visualisation or the dredging up of buried traumas to spill on stage.

A literal any-port-in-a-storm moment brings fugitive lone-wolf Quell aboard the yacht that's been chartered by Dodd, a rubicund, rotund, patriarchal bon vivant who adds him to his extended family, along with wife Peggy (Amy Adams), daughter Elizabeth (Ambyr Childers) and a coterie of well-heeled followers. Dodd is lifting anchor to embark on a fundraising tour of the East Coast, pitching a programme to the dowager set which promises mastery of the passions – though it quickly becomes obvious that this is a textbook case of the physician who can't heal himself when Dodd's cool cracks upon having to confront a simple

line of sceptical inquisition at a cocktail party, prompting him into a Tourette-like hiss of "Pig fuck". When, further along on his tour, Dodd and Quell are hauled in by the Philadelphia police and thrown into adjoining cells, it takes very little time for both to be reduced to the same level, barking at one another through the grille that separates them until finally 'the Master', who's earlier shown a smug forbearance at Freddy's fondness for breaking wind to comic effect, gives way to animal need and turns his back to take a slash.

The third corner of the triangle is Dodd's wife Peggy, who is revealed as something like the brains behind the throne: the ghost-writer dictating what will be Dodd's sophomore work to him, or giving her obeisant husband a kung-fu-grip handjob over the bathroom sink, as one might give a noisy pet a treat. Given these insights into the Dodds' conjugal bliss, Lancaster's attachment to Freddie seems like a case of vicarious-living fascination, the sort that the tamed so often harbour for the wholly undomesticated. One thinks of comparatively shy Jack Kerouac's worship of uninhibited Neal Cassady, since *The Master* is nothing if not an open invitation to plug the period's cultural reference points into it, and as much as a Method man, itinerant Freddie's full-tilt flight from this timid new white-collar world makes him an *avant la lettre* Beat poet (and he don't even know it).

As for Dodd, he belongs to a lineage of self-styled prophets and confidence men through history – and Anderson’s filmography: there’s Sunday, blackmailing funding for his Church of the Third Revelation in *There Will Be Blood*, and seduction seminar guru Frank T.J. Mackey in 1999’s *Magnolia*. Mackey was played by Tom Cruise, the most public face of Scientology, whose early years are clearly the model for Dodd’s movement ‘The Cause’, as founder L. Ron Hubbard is the taking-off point for Dodd himself. The 2007 suicides of Jeremy Blake and his girlfriend Theresa Duncan, who had alleged persecution by shadowy Scientologist forces prior to their deaths, offer a personal connection for Anderson – Blake was the digital artist who created interstitial imagery for Anderson’s 2002 *Punch-Drunk Love*, a film that, like *The Master’s*

The indeterminate spaces of Anderson's film leave plenty of room for the viewer to fill in, making it easily the best movie this year to talk about

burlesque of the classical wild-child-and-mentor tale, might be said to be 'about' self-regulation.

Another possible analogue for 'Dr' Dodd: scamming 'Professor' Harold Hill in Meredith Wilson's 1957 *The Music Man*. In two sequences that are among the most discussed in the proliferating body of exegesis surrounding *The Master*, the man who pompously describes himself to Quell as "a writer, a doctor, a nuclear physicist and a theoretical philosopher, but above all... a hopelessly inquisitive man" is seen as a mere song-and-dance showbiz razzle-dazzler. In the first, as a satyr-like Dodd performs a ribald sea shanty, 'The Maid of Amsterdam', for a houseful of potential investors, the female members of his audience are abruptly seen without clothes. Are we witnessing an actual act of mass seduction? An X-ray-glasses hallucination from erotomaniac Quell's addled brain? Peggy's jealous imagination running wild? All three? In the other, Dodd softly serenades his departing protégé after their break-up with a rendition of 'I'd Like to Get You on a) Slow Boat to China'.

This lullaby intimacy suggests that we have been watching a same-sex love story all along, though there is little enough evidence of it in what's preceded, beyond some playful rough-housing. It's one of Anderson's blind-siding gambits, which for some are proof of the filmmaker's gun-slinging artistic bravery, though more often they seem rooted in epochal ambition turned to wild desperation – frog storms, Aimee Mann singalongs, doughnut-shop and bowling-alley bloodbaths or, this time around, nudie-cutie musical numbers and homoerotic lullabies. Towering standalone moments all, they are certainly impressive when first encountered, though they wobble perilously the longer one looks at them, detached as

they are from any narrative undergirding

The indeterminate spaces of Anderson's film leave plenty of room for the viewer to fill in, making *The Master* easily the best movie this year to *talk about*. It isn't a great film – but it has a great film rattling around inside it, the story of deadlocked Freddie Quell, a dynamic study in stasis. That paradoxical tension doesn't animate Hoffman's Dodd, who has much the same weakness as Plainview in *There Will Be Blood*: it's a 'revelation' of character through reiteration of the same basic facts (Plainview's vengeful, unscrupulous covetousness, Dodd's perfidy and charlatanism) rather than the accumulation of multivalent perspectives, making for something as monotone as Jonny Greenwood's hectic dogfight score. Is *The Master* a true faith or a cult? Is Emperor P.T. dressed to the nines, or parading around starkers? Its larger contradictions happily defy such gross simplifications, even as its conception of Dodd does not. **S**

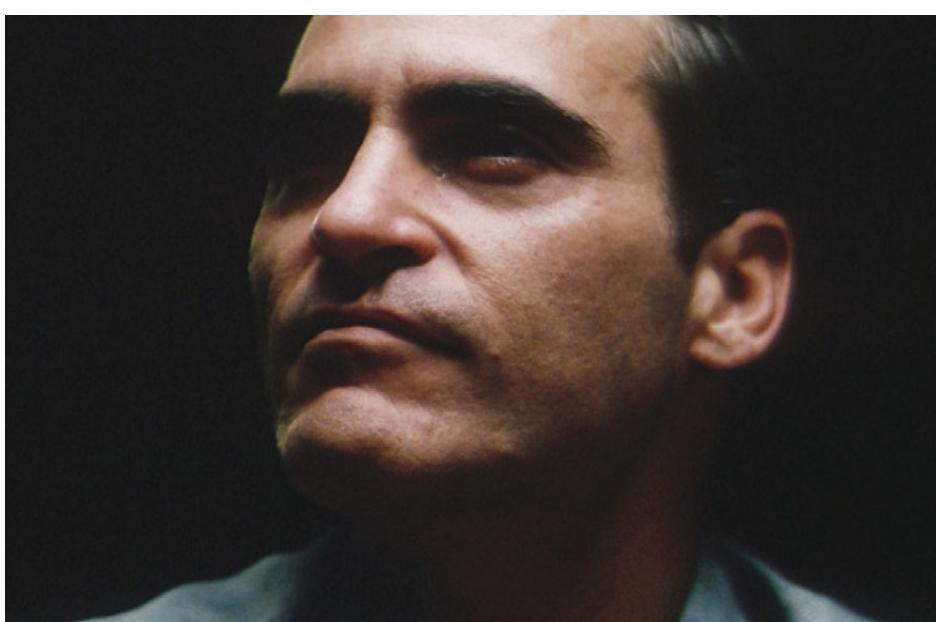


For more on 'The Master',
see the S&S website

Credits and Synopsis

The Pacific, the end of World War II. After serving in the US Navy, Freddie Quell is killing time in a tropical paradise, perfecting a homebrew liquor made from torpedo fuel. He returns to the US, where he gets – and loses – jobs as a department-store photographer and migrant labourer. At a marina he stows away on a yacht; the following day, he wakes to find that he's out at sea, and meets the yacht's captain, Lancaster Dodd. Dodd is the founder of a human-potential movement known as 'The Cause', which teaches a doctrine of mastery over the passions. Dodd and his followers are currently on their way to New York to proselytise and raise funds; en route, Dodd subjects the disturbed Quell to an analytical probing, and tries to recruit him as a disciple. After Dodd loses his temper with a hostile interlocutor at a cocktail party in New York, Quell assaults the man out of a confused sense of loyalty. Later, when Dodd is arrested as a confidence man in Philadelphia, Quell flings himself at the arresting officers and is thrown in jail along with Dodd. After another flaring of tempers at a convention for The Cause in Phoenix, Quell breaks from Dodd, returning to his native Massachusetts to look up an old girlfriend, identified as the source of his sorrow, who has since married.

Quell and Dodd reunite in England, but Quell won't submit to his friend's guidance; after being serenaded by Dodd, Quell sets out on his own for the pubs, finally ending up with a girl in his bedroom.



Joaquin Phoenix as 'extravagantly ruined drunk' Freddie Quell



Not your average romcom hero: Bradley Cooper as bipolar 'life-wrecker' Pat in David O. Russell's 'Silver Linings Playbook'

Silver Linings Playbook

USA 2012

Director: David O. Russell

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Is it possible to make a romcom that isn't a wrist-slashingly depressing exercise in cute? That's more or less the question which the subgenre of indie-romcom was invented to answer, and with the laugh/wince Venn diagram recently redrawn by Jason Reitman's squirm-inducing *Young Adult*, it's now de rigueur to crank up the predictable kookiness of the all too obviously mismatched couple way beyond eccentricity and into the realms of seriously demented dysfunctionality. For his part, David O. Russell has already proved that he's got the nerve to tackle a sassy genre reboot: 2010's *The Fighter* complicated the hackneyed one-last-shot, plucky-underdog sports plot by daring to gaze unblinkingly at despair, addiction and addled family values. *Silver Linings Playbook* pulls off the same gloriously satisfying trick, but with a few more belly laughs, simultaneously embracing and subverting its

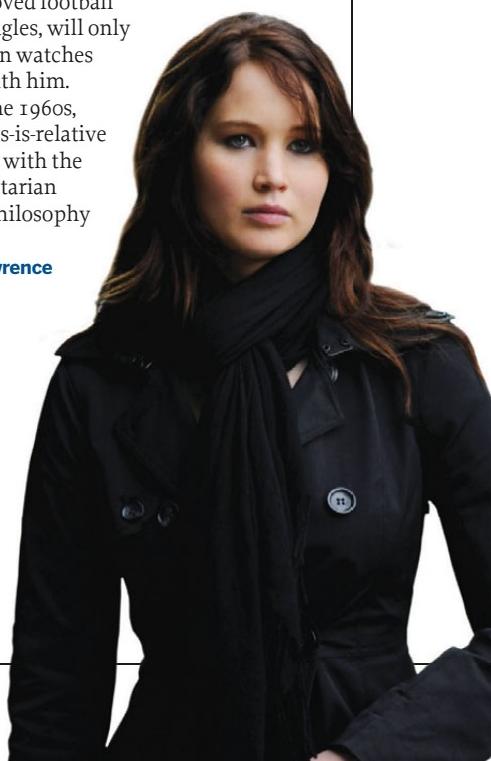
genre to tell a feelgood story about love that won't make you throw up into your popcorn.

Russell's smart, snappy script is delivered by a top-notch cast, including two thoroughly likeable and well-matched leads in the form of *Hangover* star Bradley Cooper, as bipolar life-wrecker Pat, and Jennifer Lawrence, freshly famous from *The Hunger Games*, as damaged young widow Tiffany. The film also boasts a fine turn by Robert De Niro as Pat's father, Pat Sr – a grouchy, sofa-bound gambler stuffed into a collection of ill-fitting polyester sportswear – as well as Chris Tucker, in a rare non-Jackie Chan outing, as Pat's friend Danny. Like Pat, Danny is as mad as a bag of frogs – not surprising, since they met at a mental hospital, where Pat had been incarcerated after nearly killing his wife's lover in a fit of jealous mania. That kind of backstory might be off-putting to your average Hollywood love interest, but hey, Tiffany is nuts too – at least, she's being treated for depression because she reacted to her husband's death not with picturesque grief but by sleeping around and generally acting up. Is she mad? Heck, who isn't mad? Pat's superficially stable friend Ronnie (John Ortiz) is so henpecked and hard-pressed that he's constantly contemplating

suicide; even salt-of-the-earth tough guy Pat Sr has a touch of OCD and a delusional belief that his beloved football team, the Eagles, will only win if his son watches the game with him.

Back in the 1960s, this madness-is-relative line chimed with the anti-authoritarian times: the philosophy

**Jennifer Lawrence
as Tiffany**



Tiffany is being treated for depression because she reacted to her husband's death by sleeping around. Is she mad? Heck, who isn't mad?

of Michel Foucault and the radical practice of R.D. Laing dovetailed nicely with Ken Kesey's 1962 *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* – not filmed until 1975, making the resulting Oscar-magnet even more political. There is a hint of the same libertarian recalcitrance here, too, in the early scene where Pat's mother (played with matriarchal feistiness by Jacki Weaver) insists on removing him from hospital against the doctors' orders ("But he was just getting used to the routine here!" "Exactly – I don't want him to get used to it"). But Russell's take on Pat's madness also has a lot to do with the wise-fool archetype: the jester falls over and makes an idiot of himself, but he's permitted to utter truths that no one else can bring themselves to voice. Simultaneously, we're constantly reminded that Pat and Tiffany live, not in the real world, but in the comic-romantic universe, where mental illness is harmless and amusing. Their craziness serves the romcom genre's sine qua non: hopeless cases finding love against the odds.

Because, despite the film's superficial edginess – typified by the restless handheld camerawork – we all know that the movie playbook being rifled here is heavily weighted towards schmaltz and indeed dreck. The very title could not be clearer: we're getting silver linings and happy endings whether we like it or not. Pat, who has swallowed the Disney credo that dreams really do come true, is certainly very definite on this point – in fact he's obsessively, insistently, manically sure that his happy ending will turn up any second. But – fool that he is – he thinks this will take the form of a reconciliation with his wife, and will be the result of his willingness to lose weight, get fit

and improve his mind by working through the reading list she gives her high-school students. Wrong! The jogging is fine, because it brings him into contact with Tiffany, who runs after him with 'perfect girlfriend' written all over her. But Pat's laborious self-improvement is a road to nowhere. Tough truths are ejected from his mental landscape when he hurls Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* – top of that marriage-saving reading list – through a window in disgust with an author prepared to snatch happiness away from his long-suffering protagonists. As the camera lingers on the fallen book lying in the dirt, we know that the film is saying a farewell to sombre plot twists too.

So where will the silver lining come from? Official forms of therapy are as pointless as muscular prose: unlike the life-changing counsellor who usually shows up in mental-health storylines to help the hero beat his demons (see Robin Williams in *Good Will Hunting*), Pat's shrink is the ineffectual Dr Cliff Patel (Anupam Kher), who urges him vaguely to "get a strategy" but only really has an impact when Pat meets him, off duty and besieged by racists, at an Eagles game. The ensuing brawl becomes the turning point which ushers in the third act and its inescapably triumphant momentum – not because it takes place in the rarefied arena of sporting endeavour, but because it brings home the messiness and madness that Pat and Tiffany cannot and must not escape. Pat has gone to the match to satisfy his father's crazy superstition and enable him to win the enormous and illegal bet he's hoping will save him from penury. When this plan goes wrong, it's not because it's insane; it's simply not insane enough, as Tiffany manages to prove in a hilariously cathartic showdown.

Like *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) without the disturbingly sexualised children, the plot now turns on a ludicrous quest to take part in a pointless competition, in this case a fancy ballroom dance-off. Tiffany, for no reason other than a vaguely hinted therapeutic payoff, has her heart set on taking part, and Pat agrees to partner her in return for her help in contacting his ex-wife. Now from the standard playbook, we know that such dancing contests represent a shot at self-improvement for low-status characters like *Saturday Night Fever*'s Tony Manero, or else they promise sexual initiation to uptight virgins like Baby Houseman in *Dirty Dancing*. All that grunt and effort, we're sure, will yield magic and beauty in a condensed, supercharged version of the great American myth. Sure, except that former teacher Pat's status has been on an inexorable downward slide ever since his violent outburst, and Tiffany, far from being a doe-eyed innocent, is "that crazy slut with the dead husband". Will dancing cure them? No! But it will be fun.

That you still care about and root for this idiotic couple all the way to their hopelessly hokey final embrace is a tribute to the sheer warmth of the characters Russell has sent spinning through their choreographed romcom routine. And it's also, perhaps, a tribute to our willingness to surrender to the foundational if delusional premise of romantic comedy, that one essential generic element which Russell can't subvert, whatever liberties he takes with the rest: a happy ending before the credits roll. ☉

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Donna Gigliotti
Bruce Cohen
Jonathan Gordon
Screenplay
David O. Russell
Based upon the novel
by Matthew Quick
**Director of
Photography**
Masanobu Takayanagi
Edited by
Jay Cassidy

Production Designer
Judy Becker
Music
Danny Elfman
Sound Mixer
Tom Nelson
Costume Designer
Mark Bridges
**©The Weinstein
Company, SLPTWC
Films, LLC**
Production

Companies
The Weinstein
Company presents
Made possible with
the support of the
Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania and
the Pennsylvania
Film Office
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
George Parra

**Michelle Raimo
Bradley Cooper**
Cast
Bradley Cooper
Pat
Jennifer Lawrence
Tiffany
Robert De Niro
Pat Sr
Jacki Weaver
Dolores

Anupam Kher
Dr. Cliff Patel
John Ortiz
Ronnie
Shea Whigham
Jake
Julia Stiles
Veronica
**Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS**
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors (UK)

Philadelphia, present day. Thirtysomething Pat Solitano has reached the end of his compulsory stay in a mental hospital, where he has undergone treatment for bipolar disorder after carrying out a frenzied attack on his wife Nikki's lover. Back at home, however, he refuses to take his medication, convinced that he can conquer his symptoms and win back his wife's affections through exercise and determination. When he meets Tiffany, a young widow with a wild and slutty reputation, he sees her only as a way to prove that he has a nurturing personality, and as a means of getting a secret message to his wife – which Tiffany pretends to pass on, writing the reply herself. Pat's bipolar episodes worsen, until Tiffany persuades him to partner her in a dance competition

and they begin to practise seriously. Pat's father, Pat Sr, disapproves because he superstitiously believes that his son's presence at home helps his football team, the Eagles, to win. However, Tiffany persuades him that the team really wins only when she and Pat are together, and Pat Sr places a huge bet based on this idea, combining a win for the Eagles with a side wager that Pat and Tiffany will score at least five out of ten in their dance competition.

When the big night of the dance competition arrives, the Eagles duly win and Pat and Tiffany achieve a five – despite the fact that their dance is desperately amateurish. Nikki is in the audience and Tiffany fears that she and Pat will get back together. By now, however, Pat has realised that he is in love with Tiffany.

Alex Cross

USA 2012
Director: Rob Cohen

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Some serial-killer thrillers exude a cynical vision of humankind, others radiate an unhealthy yen for torture and suffering, but this newest James Patterson adaptation exhibits nothing so much as a payload of pure, industrial-grade market calculation. Watch it carefully and you could walk away with a sophomore year's worth of huckster training and marketing-class knowhow. Patterson himself, an ex-advertising exec and far more the auteur here than the paycheque-cashing director Rob Cohen, is a mega-bestselling hack novelist who, it is widely known, employs a staff of ghost writers to churn out his scores of brainless books.

The titular character is a franchise fossil, the forensic-psychologist subject of some 18 books, previously incarnated by Morgan Freeman in *Kiss the Girls* (1997) and *Along Came a Spider* (2001). The antagonist in question, played with twitches and glaring eyeballs by Matthew Fox, is an "ex-military" killing machine "fascinated with pain". The story proceeds with a regulated, unshocking

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Bill Block
Paul Hanson
James Patterson
Steve Bowen
Randall Emmett
Leopoldo Gout
Screenplay
Marc Moss
Kerry Williamson
Based on the novel *Cross* by James Patterson

Director of Photography

Ricardo Della Rosa

Editors

Thom Noble
Matt Diezel

Production Designer

Laura Fox

Music

John Debney

Production Sound Mixer

Willie Burton

Costume Designer

Abigail Murray

Stunt Co-ordinators

Gary M. Hynes

Tom McComas

©IAC Productions, LLC

Production Companies

A Block/Hanson and James Patterson Entertainment production An Emmett/Furla Films production in association with Envision Entertainment A Summit Entertainment presentation A Rob Cohen film

Executive Producers

George Furla
Stepan Martirosyan
Rennirington Chase

Sound

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

Cast

Tyler Perry

Alex Cross

Matthew Fox

Picasso

Edward Burns

Thomas Kane

Rachel Nichols

Monica Ashe
Cicely Tyson
Nana Mama
Carmen Ejogo
Maria Cross
Giancarlo Esposito
Daramus Holiday
John C. McGinley
Captain Richard Brookwell
Jean Reno
Giles Mercier
Stephanie Jacobson
Fan Yau Lee
Werner Daehn
Erich Nunemacher

Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital Sound In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor



Perp show: Tyler Perry

stream of recycled ideas and burblings of dialogue. Most glaringly, Cross is played here by Tyler Perry, whose self-produced series of 'Madea' comedies, a franchise targeted almost exclusively at American blacks, have made Perry, virtually under the critics' radar, the most highly paid man in the entertainment industry.

Surely, the marketing roundtables must've been more thrilling than the final film, the beats and reflexes of which are so tired, so predictable, so Patterson, that the film feels like an awkward and dated remake of another movie that doesn't exist. Haven't plain old 1980s/1990s serial-killer procedurals gone the way of all flesh, after a few decades of repetitive forensic TV shows and so many hundreds of films that by now there are more spoofs than genuine genre attempts? Not that the genre, broadly sanctified decades ago by Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter books and the Oscars that went to *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), ever made a terrible amount of sense, or stood a chance at bearing so much redundancy.

The devil is in the details, one supposes, but here you're confronted with a minimum of provocative forensic data and a maximum of posturing and god-awful shaky-cam action-scene camerawork. Patterson's story is typically paper-thin, full of holes and great suppositional leaps and familiar stereotypes, which leave the cast to do all the lifting. For a gazillionaire with his own comedy empire, Perry is dull and awkward trying to play an intelligent professional, and the despair felt by Ed Burns, John C. McGinley and even Jean Reno (as the requisite Euro-target-slash-villain) in having to play under him is palpable.

That leaves Fox, who has no substantial résumé to embarrass but who manages a spectacle of cheesy moustache-twirling in any case. Shaven, unblinking and spasm-prone, he resembles no one so much as Mark Metcalf's Doug Neidermeyer, the militaristic fratboy bastard in John Landis's *Animal House* (1978), and once that association lands in your lap, the reality of Alex Cross vanishes from your frontal lobe. Certainly, speculating on a Neidermeyer sequel – Vietnam? Special forces? Serial killing? – is a more pungent nest of ideas than what Patterson has offered up. But then, nearly anything within reach is as well. **¶**

Alps

Greece 2011
Director: Yorgos Lanthimos
Certificate 15 93m 48s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

Discussing a name for their group, the members of a clandestine society settle on 'Alps', a moniker that "in no way reveals what it is we do". The same could be said of the title and opening sequence of Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos's follow-up to his critically acclaimed *Dogtooth* (2009). Dropped into a world that we ought to recognise but that's somehow all off-kilter, audiences are forced to work at piecing together the film's wilfully obscure premise, which takes its time revealing itself.

What's immediately clear is that something is rotten in the state of Greece. A gymnast's coach threatens to crack open her head if she ever again questions his authority. A dispassionate paramedic informs a critically injured accident victim that she's going to die, before casually enquiring as to her favourite actor. The film's framing is obscure, oblique: the camera sits at awkward angles, decapitating its subjects or viewing them from behind; refusing long-shots and zooming in too close; racking, refocusing, yet still offering us too little clarity to gain a purchase.

As events proceed, the sense mounts that every relationship in this film is underpinned by a set of unspoken rules – of which the characters are aware but we are not. Ever so slowly we come to understand that the members of Alps – a paramedic, a nurse, a gymnast and her coach – are making a living impersonating the deceased. For an hourly rate, they will play a beloved daughter, lost lover or even a cheating spouse, recreating key scenes and moments in tortuous detail. It's a neat premise, but curiously executed. Expounding on the significance of the organisation's name, one of the group's number explains that, "While the mountains of the Alps cannot be replaced, they could replace any other mountain." So it is that a sad-eyed thirtysomething can impersonate a teenage tennis player and a diabetic swimmer who speaks English with her lover (dutifully reciting the line "Please don't stop, it feels like paradise" as he performs cunnilingus on her; "heaven", he corrects her). Yet none of the performances given by the group members is in any way convincing – they deliver their lines blank-faced, in deadpan tones.

The willingness of their clients to play make-believe with such stodgy substitutes could have been born of desperation, but the tone is rather one of disaffection. As each interaction forms a fine filo layer on top of the preceding one, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from re-enactment. Aggeliki Papoulia's 'nurse' – the closest thing the film has to a central character – plays a role both professionally and privately, returning home between jobs to care for an ageing father with whom she has little connection and who may or may not be just one more client. The difference, in any case, is negligible.

Alps thus reiterates the twisted logic that infused *Dogtooth* (and to a certain extent producer

Detroit, the present. Forensic psychologist Alex Cross investigates a multiple murder; at the same time his wife Maria informs him that she's pregnant with their third child. Cross contemplates taking a job in Washington DC, but then he cracks the killer's code on the new case. He arrives at a billionaire's office building just as the assassin makes his move. The killer is foiled, but later shoots and kills Maria. With vengeance in mind, Cross deduces the killer's ultimate goal – his target is French multimillionaire Leon Mercier. However, Cross appears to lose the assassin after he levels a city block with a shoulder grenade, apparently killing Mercier. Further inquiries and suspicions finally lead Cross to the villain; the two men brawl in a decaying theatre and the assassin falls to his death. Cross figures out that Mercier was not in fact killed, and that he was behind the entire scheme.



The Blanc generation: Ariane Labed

Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg*). In all three films, characters seek refuge from the harsh realities of the world in a desolate kind of make-believe that is all the more remarkable for its lack of magic. As in Lanthimos's earlier film, too, the fantasy is only sustained and contained by a rigorous set of strictures. In *Alps*, these rules are imposed and enforced through brutal means by Aris Servetakis's paramedic – the group's leader, ringmaster, pimp, a man who claims the nickname Mont Blanc as it is the biggest and most important of the mountains in the range.

Here, though, the horror escapes *Dogtooth's*

cloistered garden and spills out into society at large. As we watch Papoula – the actress who tried to break out of a family home at the end of *Dogtooth* – attempting to break *into* one at the end of *Alps*, the implication can only be that there is no hope on the other side of despair. In contemporary Greece and contemporary Europe alike we are all isolated, our identities destabilised to the point of meaninglessness. The powerful abuse their powers and we continue to be complicit in this abuse. The future is bleak; no potential for action remains. Like the Alps themselves, we are walking ghosts. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Athina Rachel Tsangari
Yorgos Lanthimos
Written by
Yorgos Lanthimos
Efthimis Filippou
Director of Photography
Christos Voudouris
Editor
Yorgos Mavropsaridis
Production Designer

Anna Georgiadou
Sound Design
Leandros Ntouris
Costume Design
Thanos Papastergiou
Vassilia Rozana

©Haos Film
Production Companies
A Haos Film production in co-production with

ERT, Faliro House Productions, Feelgood Entertainment, Marni Films, Avion Fims, Cactus Three Fims, Lee Polydor, Christos Voudouris, Maharaja Films, Victoria Bousis, Thoma Kikis, Andreas Zoumpasis Kritikos, Johnny Vekris, Aggeliki Papoula, Maria Hatzakou, Matt

Johnson, Thanos Papastergiou with the support of the Greek Film Centre and the Media Programme of the European Union

Cast

Aggeliki Papoula
nurse
Aris Servetakis

paramedic
Johnny Vekris
coach
Ariane Labed
gymnast
Stavros Psillakis
nurse's father
Efthimis Filippou
lighting shop owner
Efthalia Stefanidou
blind lady

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

8,442 ft +0 frames

Greece, the present. A gymnast trains with her aggressive coach, who refuses to let her perform to a pop song. A paramedic and a nurse take an unusual interest in the personal life of one of their patients, a 16-year-old tennis player. The gymnast, coach, paramedic and nurse congregate in a gymnasium, where they agree on a name for their group – 'Alps' – and select monikers for themselves (the paramedic, the group's leader, chooses 'Mont Blanc', after the biggest of the mountains). It transpires that Alps is an organisation providing a service to paying clients: the group's members substitute themselves for deceased relatives and friends, acting the part of a lost loved one for a few hours a week in order to ease the bereaved into letting go. The nurse's roles include the diabetic wife

of a middle-aged man and the treacherous best friend of an elderly widow. When the tennis player's injuries take a turn for the worse, the nurse is instructed by Mont Blanc to target her parents. However, when the tennis player eventually passes away, the nurse tells her colleagues that the girl has miraculously recovered, while covertly offering to work for her parents for free. The nurse forms a close attachment to her new clients, but when Mont Blanc uncovers the deceit he beats her, and replaces her with the gymnast. The nurse appears to have a breakdown, which culminates in her breaking into the tennis player's bedroom and refusing to leave until the father forcibly ejects her.

As the film closes, the gymnast performs to Hot Butter's pop hit 'Popcorn'.

Amour

France/Germany/Austria 2012
Director: Michael Haneke
Certificate 12A 127m 23s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Michael Haneke and his collaborators have long made a habit of wrong-footing audiences. Over the course of his 25-year career, idyllic escapes have turned to group suicide, generic thrillers to loaded critiques of media violence. Suspense offers no catharsis; post-apocalyptic dramas refuse to reveal their catastrophes. Given the Austrian auteur's rise to arthouse darling over the past decade, few will be expecting a film with the title *Amour*, then, to be a hearts-and-flowers affair. And yet with his latest work Haneke has perhaps pulled his biggest surprise out of the bag: far from the excruciating, excoriating ordeal one might have expected, *Amour* emerges as a delicate and tender elegy for a lifetime of love.

In a pair of breathtaking performances, Emmanuelle Riva and Jean-Louis Trintignant play Anne and Georges Laurent, married former music teachers enjoying – at least initially – the spoils of retirement. They are happy, affectionate, active and content. The sitting room of their Paris apartment is handsomely furnished, full to the brim with books and sheet music, centred around a gleaming baby grand. Unlike their namesakes in Haneke's 2005 film *Hidden*, they are an authentically cultured couple whose interest in the arts far exceeds the mere appearance of erudition. The spines of their paperbacks are cracked and worn; in their tired but cosy kitchenette, they pour each other tea and compare notes on the new biography of conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Haneke treats them fondly, piling on none of the scorn that he has heaped on previous protagonists of his films.

Amour opens with an ominous, unsettling flashforward which renders all that follows a foregone conclusion. So despite early red herrings, such as an attempted break-in and (in an unusual use of handheld camera) a bizarre, Lynchian dream sequence hinting at a haunting, we are prepared for it when Anne suffers a stroke, and when her condition subsequently worsens. Less expected, perhaps, is the unshakeable loyalty that Georges shows to his wife.

Haneke and Riva (incredibly brave, utterly convincing) don't shy from showing Anne's deterioration in all its mundane horror, as she gradually loses control of her limbs, her bladder, her voice. At her lowest point she is little more than a terrible, twisted shell of herself. And most terrible of all is the fact that she knows it. Some critics have understood her descent into gibberish as dementia, but a scene in which she furiously refuses to eat or drink suggests that there is a mind trapped within the body, one which knows refusal is the only form of control left to it. In the face of her rage and rejection, Georges tends to her with an uncommon grace. He may be frail – his attempts to hoist her from bed to wheelchair resemble a slow, shuffling two-step – but until the film's very end he is her fierce protector, as his final act of devotion makes devastatingly clear.

There are elements of Haneke's signature style in *Amour*. As ever, he is in

See Interview
on page 54





Love to death: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Emmanuelle Riva

absolute control, carving a sleek, marbled sculpture out of his material. Repeated here are the trademark shots refracted through mirrors or multiple doorframes, and down long, empty corridors; the elaborate recreations of bourgeois interiors; the intense spatial precision; the careful choreography of bodies in order to draw our gaze through the frame until it comes to rest on precisely the spot that the director would have it. Here, too, are the sudden, shocking eruptions of violence that momentarily cause hands to fly, unthinkingly, to mouths – although in one case the prompt is purely verbal.

Yet DP Darius Khondji (who previously worked with Haneke on his *Funny Games* US remake) imbues the interior of the

apartment – where almost all the film takes place – with a gentle warmth that softens Haneke's usual edges, an effect heightened by the director's first conventional use of a non-diegetic soundtrack. Remarkably too there is little place for didacticism or smug reflexivity. An early shot of the Laurents seated within a theatrical audience notwithstanding, Haneke plays it more or less straight here.

What Haneke give us with *Amour* is a love story, one that is compassionate, powerful and intelligent, and that treats its protagonists and its audiences with respect. Coming from such a punitive director, such unexpected kindness is blindsiding. It is also, undeniably, immensely moving. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Margaret Menegoz
Stefan Arndt
Veit Heiduschka

Written by

Michael Haneke
Darius Khondji

Editing

Monika Willi
Nadine Muse

Art Direction

Jean-Vincent Puzos

Sound

Guillaume Sciamozza

Jean-Pierre Laforte

Costumes

Catherine Leterrier

Production Companies

Les Films du

Losange, X Filme

Creative Pool,

Wega Film, France

3 Cinéma, ARD

Degeto, Bayerischer

Rundfunk,

Westdeutscher

Rundfunk

Production Companies

Les Films du

Losange, X Filme

Creative Pool and

Wega Film present a

co-production with

France 3 Cinema, ARD

Degeto, Bayerischer

Isabelle Huppert

Eva
Alexandre Tharaud

Alexandre Tharaud

William Shimell

Geoff

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Artificial Eye Film
Company

11,464 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title

Amour

Paris, the present. Police officers break into an apartment, where they find the corpse of an elderly woman, surrounded by flowers.

Some months earlier, Anne and Georges Laurent, retired music teachers in their eighties, attend a concert given by one of Anne's former piano students, Alexandre Tharaud. Returning home, the couple find that there has been an attempted break-in at their flat. The next morning, over breakfast, Anne goes into a trance, but on snapping out of it remembers nothing. It transpires that she has had a small stroke, the first of several. In conversation with the couple's adult daughter Eva, Georges explains that Anne has subsequently had an unsuccessful operation; later she appears in a wheelchair, the right side of her body now paralysed. Having promised Anne that he will not put her in a home or a hospital, Georges is placed under increasing strain as her condition deteriorates and he struggles to care for her alone. Visits from Eva and Alexandre prove awkward and uncomfortable. The part-time nurse Georges hires is brusque to the point of brutality, and he fires her after a vicious confrontation.

Time passes. Anne loses the ability to communicate; it becomes unclear whether or not she is in control of her mind. When she refuses food and water, Georges slaps her. When Eva visits, he tries to prevent her seeing her mother in her terrible state. Finally, one evening, after telling Anne a story, Georges smothers her to death with a pillow, and seals up her room. He stays in the flat for some time after the event before finally following a vision of a healthy Anne out of the apartment front door and into the corridor beyond. In a postscript, Eva visits the flat but finds it empty.

Aurora

Romania/France/Switzerland/Germany 2010

Director: Cristi Puiu

Certificate 12A 183m 33s

Reviewed by Ryan Gilbey

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

Directors who take the lead role in their own film can never be accused of allowing creative decisions to be made on the casting couch. But there are other benefits too, not least the access such a choice provides to submerged levels of meaning. Nuri Bilge Ceylan invited a biographical frisson by casting himself as a selfish lover in *Climates* (2006) opposite his wife Ebru Ceylan; the masochistic humiliations for which Roman Polanski volunteered in *The Tenant* (1976) seem now to suggest a man nominating himself for punishment for crimes unspecified, or not yet committed. Cristi Puiu gives a taciturn portrayal of a bitter but methodical killer in *Aurora*, and there's an extra intensity generated by our knowledge that it is Puiu who plotted out the terrible actions of his character, Viorel, as well as deciding how to stage them for the camera. Film and performance share the same dogged, implacable quality.

As with Puiu's riveting 2005 film *The Death of Mr Lazarescu*, the drama of *Aurora* (the second of his proposed 'Six Stories from the Outskirts of Bucharest') is restricted to a relatively short timeframe – in this case, approximately 36 hours, during which Viorel, a divorced and redundant (or demoted) engineer and father of two, commits four murders. The first pair of killings are decontextualised almost to the degree of Alan Clarke's *Elephant* (1989): despite spending nearly half the film's 170-minute running time with Viorel as he prepares for this double shooting, we know virtually nothing about him and even less about his victims. The camera follows him as he creeps furtively across railway tracks, between parked lorries and through a factory; it loiters in adjacent rooms as he plods glumly around his paint-stripped apartment. He endures common-or-garden irritations (a leak from the upstairs flat, an interminable wait to buy a piece of cake) that intensify his air of mute disdain. But we are none the wiser about his motives by the time he opens fire on a couple in an underground car park. The wide shot in which the killing is framed only underlines our remoteness from the action and its meaning.

Puiu the filmmaker is as meticulous in withholding information as Puiu the actor, whose hawkish, flattened profile suggests a gravedigger hit in the face with his own shovel. Clues remain sparse until a police interview unpicks the film's mysteries in the final 20 minutes, but what changes before then is emphasis: once we have seen that Viorel is capable of murder, his most innocuous gestures assume a paralysing weight. The film places him in situations that only exacerbate his volatility and our dread – a clothes shop where the assistants cower from him; a school where his daughter's teacher challenges his decision to take the child home early. Even as he denies the audience any tidbits of information, Puiu steers our responses as fastidiously as any straight-arrow genre director.

It's almost a shame that the details of Viorel's victims and motivation have to be revealed

Cinema Komunisto

Serbia/The Netherlands/Greece 2010
Director: Mila Turajlic

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

**See interview
on page 63**



Murder he wrought: Cristi Puiu

at all, since there is an obscure purity to the film as long as his actions are divorced from exposition. Once it invites us to piece together the trail of suffering, from the *mise en scène* (a yard criss-crossed with washing lines on which children's clothes ripple on the breeze) to the terse dialogue between Viorel and his former mother-in-law, the film sacrifices some of its potency for a wronged-husband revenge story torn from the tabloids.

Despite this, the power generated by Puiu's positioning of the camera never wavers. Though there are handheld tracking shots to keep tabs on Viorel's movements outside, the predominant camera angle looks out on the action from its vantage point at the back of a room, with the door frame within the screen creating a restricted space into which the actors find themselves crammed. That camera renders us not so much voyeurs as accomplices. Stuck on the back seat

of Viorel's car (he looks almost straight into the lens whenever he twists round in his seat to reverse) or waiting in the living room of a suburban house while he beats to death the owner off screen, we are complicit in crimes of which we have at best a limited understanding.

There have been suggestions that *Aurora* is a black comedy, but even the gallows variety of humour that characterised *Mr Lazarescu* is entirely absent, the better to convey the asphyxiating effect of violence on Viorel and his world. A smile might be raised by his visit to his childhood bedroom, its ELO posters proudly displayed, but the nearest thing to an outright gag is the use of a jaunty Four Tops song blasting out of a supermarket PA system. Even that turns out in retrospect to allude to the catalyst for Viorel's breakdown: "It's the same old song/But with a different meaning since you've been gone..." ☀

In *Koba the Dread*, his study of Joseph Stalin and his legacy, Martin Amis tells of the long minutes of applause that followed the leader's speeches, and the collective fear amid his retinue of being the first to cease clapping. Amis asserts that there existed at the time an eight-sided gramophone recording, the final side of which was solely applause. Amis invites us to "imagine sitting there listening to that eighth side... It must have sounded like the approach of fear, like the music of psychosis, like the rage of the state." Now, Josip Broz Tito was not Joseph Stalin – his Yugoslavia was not a place of gulags and mass starvation – nor even a fellow traveller, once he split his nation off from the Soviet Union in 1948. But the fervent devotion that he once commanded lives on in some of his old associates – to the extent that some of them might still happily bask in the recorded roar of long-dispersed crowds.

Mila Turajlic's slickly made documentary on Yugoslavia's politically charged cinema history presents this enduring infatuation as a cute oddity, encouraging our indulgent sniggers as Tito's projectionist Leka Konstantinovic recalls his tireless efforts to keep his film-crazy employer supplied with daily screenings. ("Sometimes, I felt like crying... From 1948 to 1970, I took no leave of absence...") Other contributors display greater distance – Tito's obsessive attention to the details of state film production was, says star actor Bata Zivojinovic, "fateful for those of us making the films"; and one-time studio boss Gile Djuric notes that his career was over once he began querying the party line. But Turajlic's film – buoyed along by an insistent mood-setting score of upbeat orchestration and kitschy local songs – still opts to characterise Tito's intervention in film production as sweet and amusing rather than sinister, even when all concerned will tend to concede that the films thus created were – in Zivojinovic's words – "absolutely terrible".

It's an odd approach, gesturing towards celebrating the freedom that Tito bestowed on filmmakers ("With his permission you were free to do as you pleased") but at the same time forced to concede that this freedom was largely illusory – and the resulting films insignificant – and finally settling for presenting the whole scenario as a sort of mass delusion inviting condescending pats on the head for the true believers.

The intention has obviously been to make an upbeat film – a sleek, rousing, tongue-in-cheek tale of weirdos at large, suited to a mainstream documentary market – but the results are unsatisfying. The anecdotes are mostly a bit pale, the film clips selected for optimum tackiness (and largely unidentified to boot). Context is reduced to abrupt onscreen captions, so that Tito's actual beliefs and intentions remain obscure, beyond his oft-stated fondness for cinema. Did he love cinema as anything more than a useful propaganda tool? For all the camera time devoted to the slavish manservant Konstantinovic, that's not made clear, but certainly the dictator's

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Anca Puiu

Bobby Paunescu

Screenplay

Cristi Puiu

Director of Photography

Viorel Sergovici

Editor

Ioachim Stroe

Art Directors

Vali Ighigeanu

Andreea Popa

Sound

André Rigaut

François Musy

Cristian Tarnovetchi

Costumes

Ana Andrei

Monica Florescu

©Mandrakor, Parisienne de Production, Bord Cadre Films, Essential Filmproduktion, ARTE France Cinéma, ZDF/ARTE Production

Companies

A Mandragora production in collaboration with Parisienne de Production, Bord Cadre Films, Essential Filmproduktion

With the support of CNC - Central National al Cinematografiei Romania, ARTE France Cinéma, ZDF/ARTE, Eurimages, SC Serv Invest SRL, Office Fédéral de la Culture (OFC) Suisse, Societatea Romana de Televiziune,

Centre National de la Cinématographie, HBO Romania, Télévision Suisse Romande – an SRG/SSR Idée Suisse company

Executive Producer

Anca Puiu

Cast

Clara Voda

Gina

Valeria Seciu

Pusa

Catinel Dumitrescu

Mrs Rodica Livinski

Luminita Gheorghiu

Miora

Valentin Popescu

Stoian

Gelu Colceag

Mr Livinski

Simona Popescu

Gheorghe Ifrim

Cristi Puiu

Viorel Ghenghea

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

New Wave Films

16,519 ft +8 frames

Bucharest, the present. Viorel Ghenghea leaves the home of his girlfriend Gina early in the morning and spies on a woman and two children before collecting firing pins for a gun from a work colleague. At his own apartment, he assembles a gun. He visits his neighbour upstairs to report a leak through his bathroom ceiling. His mother and her partner call in at his apartment. He buys a second-hand gun and practises firing it into a sleeping bag. In an underground car park, he shoots dead a man and a woman. He visits Gina, but she is busy tending to her husband and daughter. He takes some possessions to store at his mother's apartment, where he tells his stepfather that he despises him. He visits another house and shoots dead its two inhabitants. He goes to a clothes shop to look for a woman named Andreea; on discovering that she doesn't work there any more, he intimidates the shop assistants. He takes the eldest of his two daughters out of school, and leaves her with his mother's neighbour. At a police station, he confesses to four murders and reveals the victims' identities: his ex-wife's notary and the woman who happened to be with him in the car park, and his former parents-in-law.



Yugo first: Elizabeth Taylor, Josip Broz Tito

influence on local production doesn't appear to have made the films better.

His clumsy interventions are, however, played for laughs, with numerous clips of absurd scenes in which Nazis despair about

the indefatigability of the Yugoslav masses and query the origins of their dauntless spirit. Was he scripting a creation myth for his state – as this film's publicity asserts – or just leaning on filmmakers to make crappy films? Either way... is it really that *funny*? The film presents no information on the history of film production in the region prior to the formation of Yugoslavia. No attention is given either to artists who were trying to make films outside Tito's coterie, or what happened to them. The consequence is a perky documentary that occupies a benign corner (Tito being likely the world's most admired example of a 'benign dictator') of totalitarian kitsch, relying for its appeal on the same impulse that draws people towards funny websites about Kim Jong-Il or books like Peter York's *Dictator Style: Lifestyles of the World's Most Colourful Despots*. Such breeziness is a touch surprising, given that the director is a Serbian in her thirties and so grew up through the tumult that followed Tito's demise and Yugoslavia's dissolution. Then again, her film has reached multiplexes in Serbia; and perhaps a gentle nostalgia piece that doesn't ask too many hard questions is exactly what she wanted to make.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Dragan Pesikan

Producers

Iva Plemic Divjak

Mila Turajlic

Dejan Petrovic

Goran Jasic

Cinelabs Belgrade

Written by

Mila Turajlic

Director of Photography

Goran Kovacevic

Edited by

Aleksandra

Milovanovic

Original Score

Nemanja Mosurovic

Supervising Sound Editor

Aleksandar Protic

©Dribbling Pictures

Production Companies

Dribbling Pictures

presents in co-

production with 3K

Productions and

Intermedia Network

with the support of

Jan Vrijman Fund,

City of Belgrade,

Film Center Serbia,

ERT Greece

Film Extracts

Slavica (1947)

Na svoji zemlji/On

Our Own Land (1948)

Barba Zvane/Uncle

Zvane (1949)

Jezero (1950)

Daelko je sunce

(1953)

Subotom uvecе/Saturday Night (1957)

La tempesta/

Oluja (1958)

Partizanske

price/Partisan

Stories (1960)

Ljubavi modu/Love

and Fashion (1960)

Bolje je umeti/Better Wise Than Rich (1960)

Parce plavog neba/A Piece of Blue Sky (1961)

Dvoje/We Two (1961)

Letо je kribo za sve/Summer Madness (1961)

Nas avto/Our

Car (1962)

Prekobrojna/Chasing Michael (1962)

Zivizduk u 8/Whistle at 8 (1962)

Kozara/Hill of Death (1963)

Desant na Drvar/The SS Attack at Dawn (1963)

Prometej sa otoka Visvice/Prometheus from the Island of Visvica (1964)

The Long Ships (1964)

Lito Vilovito/Mad Summer (1964)

Slobzeni polozaj (1964)

Genghis Khan (1965)

La fabuleuse aventure de Marco Polo/Marco the Magnificent (1965)

Tople godine/Hot Years (1966)

Kako su se voleti Romeo i Julija/Romeo and Juliet of Today (1966)

Mali Vojnici/Playing

at Soldiers (1967)

Nemirni/The Restless Ones (1967)

Koraci kroz maglu (1967)

Podne/Noon (1968)

Pre istine/Before the Truth (1968)

Most/The Bridge (1969)

Zaseda/The Ambush (1969)

Bitka na Neretvi/The Battle of Neretva (1969)

Uloga moje porodice u svjetskoj revoluciji/The Role of My Family in the Revolution (1971)

Sluzbeni polozaj (1964)

Velter brani Sarajevo/

Walter Defends Sarajevo (1972)

Sutjeska/The Fifth Offensive (1973)

Bombasi (1973)

SB zatvara krug/The Security Service Closes In (1974)

Uzicka Republika/67 Days (1974)

Partizani/

Partisans (1974)

Crveni udar/The Miner's Detachment (1974)

Doktor Mladen/Doctor Mladen (1975)

Vrhovi Zelengore/The Peaks of Zelengore (1976)

Nije negra/Tit for Tat (1978)

Dvoboj za juznu prugu/Battle for the Railway (1978)

Bosko Buha (1978)

Partizanska eskadrila/Battle Squadron (1979)

Osvajanje slobode/Winning of Freedom (1979)

Walter brani Sarajevo/

Walter Defends Sarajevo (1972)

Sutjeska/The Fifth Offensive (1973)

Bombasi (1973)

SB zatvara krug/The Security Service Closes In (1974)

Uzicka Republika/67 Days (1974)

Partizani/

Very Day (1987)

Tri karte za Holivud/Three Tickets to Hollywood (1993)

Lepa sela lepo gore/Pretty Village Pretty Flame (1996)

With

Stevan Dj. Petrovic

Veljko Despotovic

Velimir Bata

Zivojinovic

Dragisa Gile Djuric

Veljko Bulajic

Aleksander Leka

Konstantinovic

Vlastimir Vasta

Gavrik

Ranko Petric

Dan Tana

Sulejman

Memo Begic

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

E2 Films

Crossfire Hurricane

USA/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Brett Morgen

Certificate 15 111m 3s

Reviewed by Carmen Gray

Clichéd jokes about the band having been too drug-addled to remember anything aside, fresh insight on The Rolling Stones' 50 years together is a tough ask for *Crossfire Hurricane*, the official anniversary documentary. With the plethora of iconic scenes and tales that have made them the quintessential archetype of a lawless, bacchanalian rock 'n' roll band, the problem for director Brett Morgen (who documented another counterculture heavyweight, Robert Evans, in 2002's *The Kid Stays in the Picture*) is inevitably not one of myth creation but distillation. And with Mick Jagger as co-producer, the band have shrewdly commanded how the record is set.

Of the numerous Stones documentaries, the most notable have been the Maysles brothers' *Gimme Shelter* (recording the out-of-control 1969 Altamont concert) and Robert Frank's unreleased *Cocksucker Blues*. Frank joined them on the road in 1972 and used a rambling, down-and-dirty naturalism to play to voyeuristic hunger for behind-the-scenes authenticity. *Crossfire Hurricane* also focuses on the group's heyday, avoiding their latter decades. Recent interviews with current and former Stones form the documentary's backbone, their voices reflecting on pivotal moments over archival footage. Though their aged faces remain off-camera, the film doesn't feel like a vanity project – rather, it frankly acknowledges where their real cultural significance lies.

Scenes of crowd hysteria mark their rise (Wyman, deadpan, recalls "rivers of urine" in the stalls from fans wetting themselves; Jagger sits bemused as a TV presenter deems him a modern saint whom females yearn literally to devour). Humorous nods to the band's allure aside, the film skirts around the 'sex' element of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle, leaving personal entanglements offscreen.

The Stones assert that their dangerous, anti-establishment image was more foisted upon them than engineered; that, positioned by their manager as the anti-Beatles, they merely reflected the violence of the time. Jagger describes with disarming humour a "really nice day" he spent with Richards in 1967 when they dropped acid and walked in the countryside, stopping off to milk a cow – a sharp disjunct to the Redlands drug bust faced on their return, which saw them narrowly escape prison. Richards asserts without irony that he never had a problem with drugs, just with the police, whose targeting simply goaded them: "That was when we really put the black hat on. Before that it was off-grey."

Footage has been mined assiduously from previous Stones documentaries. While this will disappoint hardcore fans, tighter editing makes it more exhilarating, and the band's commentary adds fresh texture. Profoundly chilling is the segment about Altamont, where a fatal stabbing by wasted Hells Angels enlisted as security occurred front-of-stage; footage lifted from *Gimme Shelter* hones in on the demented expressions of crowd-goers on bad trips – coloured by hindsight, the event came to symbolise the end of free-love optimism – as the band recall how scared they were. Excerpts from *Cocksucker Blues* (blocked from

Footage from some 80 feature films and interviews with prominent figures from the industry document the development of Yugoslav cinema as the country established its identity following its formation in the wake of WWII. Among the interviewees is Leka Konstantinovic, who served as personal projectionist to Josip Broz Tito, and who tells of the leader's great passion for film.

Having learned from the Soviets about the power of narrative cinema as a propaganda tool, Tito initially works in collaboration with the Mosfilm studios to produce pictures in the Soviet collectivist mode, glorifying the state and its workers. After splitting from Stalin in 1948, however, Tito welcomes Hollywood product into Yugoslavia; we see American newsreel reports on Yugoslavians queuing to see Tarzan Triumphs. A glut of trashy war films glorifying the partisan struggle follows; Tito encourages the free use of real military equipment and real soldiers as actors.

He plans construction of a vast 'film city' for domestic and international production. Although only part of this is ever realised, in the form of the Avala film studios, it succeeds in attracting Hollywood productions to use its facilities, and international stars begin to visit. Yugoslavia enters a time of prosperity, and Tito is internationally celebrated. The Pula Film Festival is established to celebrate Yugoslav film. Tito funds the major war picture The Battle of Neretva with an injection from the national budget reserve. Yul Brynner stars, the film is nominated for an Academy Award, and Pablo Picasso designs a poster for it. Richard Burton comes to Avala studios to play Tito in The Battle of Sutjeska. Tito's health fails and he dies in May 1980. In 1991, the Pula festival is cancelled amid growing ethnic violence, and the country descends into war.

In the present day, Leka Konstantinovic wanders the ruins of Tito's former residence, bombed by Nato in 1999.



Rebel yell: The Rolling Stones

release by The Stones, apprehensive that it could prevent them re-entering the US) hint at on-tour hedonism but leave out its scenes of heroin injection and offhand carnality.

The fallout from drugs for those without Richards's iron mental constitution, at a time when few knew much about addiction, is acknowledged. Line-up changes resulted. Mick Taylor says he left due to a growing habit and a desire to get out of "Keith's orbit". An early guiding force musically, Brian Jones is shown wafting into the studio, unfit to function. The band's words on his death are measured, their sense of guilt palpable. Jagger asks how many months it was after they asked him to leave that he drowned. "It was two weeks, Mick!" he's corrected.

Of all the Stones, it's Jagger who remains most inscrutable. He denies acting; cites *The Master and Margarita* and Baudelaire as his models for 'Sympathy for the Devil' (an electric performance of which is featured); claims playing the extrovert showman gets exhausting. The film (opening title: "Never let the truth stand in the way of a good story") shows that the band's image has always been filtered through one lens or another. It's almost a neat retort to Frank, whose relentless aesthetic of sordid hotel-room banality was as selective as any glamorisation. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mick Jagger
Victoria Pearman
Written by
Brett Morgan
Film Editors
Conor O'Neill
Stuart Levy
Music Supervisors
Peter Afterman
Margaret Yen
Sound Design/Supervision
Cameron Frankley

©50 Years, LLC.

Production Companies
The Rolling Stones and Eagle Rock Entertainment presents a Tremolo production
A Milkwood film
Executive Producers
Keith Richards
Charlie Watts
Ronnie Wood
In Colour

Distributor
More2Screen
9,994 ft + frames
UK publicity title
The Rolling Stones Crossfire Hurricane

A documentary charting the 50-year career of British band The Rolling Stones, focusing mainly on their rise to superstardom, significance as a countercultural force and vilification by the authorities in the 1960s and 1970s. Interviews with the current line-up and former members Bill Wyman and Mick Taylor accompany archival footage of the band touring the US and recording in the South of France. Live concert footage also features.

End of Watch

USA 2012

Director: David Ayer
Certificate 15 108m 48s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

David Ayer specialises in Angelenos who straddle the line between law and criminality. *Training Day* (2001), which Ayer wrote, and *Street Kings* (2008), which he directed, as well as many of the films he's co-written – *The Fast and the Furious* (2001), *Dark Blue* (2002), *S.W.A.T.* (2003) – all feature at least one LA policeman who is either deeply corrupt or flirting with the other side, while the unstable protagonist of Ayer's directorial debut *Harsh Times* (2005) can't decide between joining the LAPD, working for Homeland Security or peddling guns and drugs himself.

So when, at the beginning of Ayer's latest feature *End of Watch*, officer Brian Taylor (Jake Gyllenhaal) is heard in voiceover declaring, "We stand together, a thin blue line, protecting the prey from the predators, the good from the bad," viewers may be forgiven for expecting these words to foreshadow a rather greyer moral line. But no. As Taylor and his partner Mike Zavala (Michael Peña) patrol the streets of South Central, they adhere to a strict routine of good cop/good cop, rescuing children, fighting crime and – eventually – bleeding for their cause. Meanwhile, as though to underline the film's ethical certitudes, a Mexican street gang is led by a man known only as Big Evil (Maurice Compte) and peopled by a rogues' gallery of badass caricatures.

The film's racial politics are a little less black-and-white than its morality. Much of the bromantic banter between WASP-ish Taylor and Hispanic Zavala is dedicated to gently mocking their ethnic and cultural differences, while the crimes they investigate trace a demographic shift from African-American to Mexican dominance. None of this is drawn subtly – black gangster Mr Tre (Cle Sloan) is in the middle of complaining that the street's chicken shops have been overtaken by taco stands and that "it's going to be extinct niggers pretty soon" when an expressly territorial drive-by shooting interrupts him, conducted by Big Evil's gang as though in



Knocking off: Jake Gyllenhaal

direct response to Mr Tre's pronouncements.

Still, Ayer does maintain a certain balance: if the deleterious impact of Hispanic gangs and Mexican drug cartels is highlighted, a more salutary picture is suggested by scenes that involve Zavala's extended family celebrating birthdays and weddings; and if Big Evil's gang includes a no-nonsense lesbian Latina (Yahira Garcia), then Taylor's unit has one of those too (America Ferrera). Accordingly, the film presents a dialectic between exclusion and integration, order and underworld, which at least strives to be even-handed, although the results are often also absurdly broad in their delineation.

Ayer's decision to incorporate 'first-person' camerawork – compiling what we see from a (fictive) selection of digicam footage shot by Taylor, Zavala and the crews of Mr Tre and Big Evil – was no doubt intended to infuse *End of Watch* with a gritty, ground-level realism, but it's undermined by the bizarre interweaving of this 'found footage' with other, entirely non-diegetic shots (often filmed, confusingly, in the same visceral handheld style). Viewers attempting to determine who's filming what at any given moment will quickly discover that the authenticity normally associated with this cinematographic method yields to a messier kind of postmodern decentring which in no way serves – let alone protects – an otherwise over-simple story of good and evil. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Lesher
David Ayer
Nigel Sinclair
Matt Jackson
Written by
David Ayer
Director of Photography
Roman Vasyanov
Editor
Dody Dorn
Production Designer
Devorah Herbert
Music
David Sardy
Sound Mixer
Lisa Pinerio
Costume Designer
Mary Claire Hannan

©Sole Productions, LLC and Hedge Fund Film Partners, LLC
Production Companies
Open Road Films and Exclusive Media present in association with EFF-Hedge

Fund Films a Le Grisbi production in association with Crave Films
A David Ayer film
Executive Producers
Randall Emmett
Stephan Martirosyan
Remington Chase
Adam Kassan
Chrisann Verges
Guy East
Tobin Armbrust
Jake Gyllenhaal

Cast

Jake Gyllenhaal
Brian Taylor
Michael Peña
Mike Zavala
Anna Kendrick
Janet
Natalie Martinez
Gabby
America Ferrera
Orozco
Frank Grillo
Sarge
David Harbour

Van Hauser
Cle Sloan
Mr Tre
Jaime Fitzsimons
Captain Reese
Cody Horn
Davis
Shondrella Avery
Bonita
Cle Sloan
Mr Tre
Maurice Compte
Big Evil
Yahira 'Flakiss' Garcia
La La

Dolby Digital/
Datasat Digital
Sound
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited
9,792 ft + 0 frames

South Central Los Angeles, the present. Cleared of homicide charges after a shootout, LAPD officers Taylor and Zavala return to duty, with Taylor recording their professional and personal lives on digicam. In a dispute involving gang member Mr Tre, Zavala earns Mr Tre's respect by keeping a scuffle off the charge sheet. Later the partners discover the burnt remains of a car used by the Mexican 'Curbside' gang in a drive-by against Mr Tre's crew. Answering complaints about noise levels at a party, Taylor, Zavala and fellow officers Orozco and Davis square up to Curbside leaders Big Evil and La La. Later Taylor and Zavala arrest a Curbsider in possession of guns and money. The partners are awarded medals for rescuing children from a fire. Returning to the Curbside house, the two uncover a people-trafficking operation, and are warned by a federal officer not to mess with the Mexican cartels. Zavala's wife Gabby has a baby; Taylor's relationship with girlfriend Janet leads to marriage and pregnancy. Checking on a missing old lady, Taylor and Zavala discover a large drugs haul and many mutilated bodies. Mr Tre warns them that a Mexican cartel wants them dead. The officers pursue a car into a Curbside ambush. Taylor is severely injured; Zavala is killed protecting him.

Everything or Nothing 007

USA/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Stevan Riley

Certificate 12A 97m 55s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Director Stevan Riley has described his documentary about the Bond franchise as "a survival story". The strength of his film is precisely that it's not simply a 50th-anniversary celebration of the long-running series – Riley also highlights the sometimes acrimonious behind-the-scenes battles and makes it very obvious that 007 has often proved a curse as well as a blessing to his creators.

Everything or Nothing is conventionally structured. Riley starts by probing away at the motivations of Bond author Ian Fleming, portrayed here as a brilliant but tormented figure who regarded Bond as an alter ego. Then, in largely chronological fashion, we're taken through the story of how Bond was brought to the screen and kept there against the odds. Riley (who also directed the excellent 2010 documentary *Fire in Babylon*, about the all-conquering West Indies cricket team of the late 1970s) is clearly drawn to the more flamboyant and surprising characters in Bond history. There is, for example, a long interview with Australian former model and Bond actor George Lazenby, in which he describes how he was swiftly dispensed with after just one movie when he embraced 1960s counterculture. (Archive footage shows him at the premiere of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* with long hair and a beard, looking more like late-Beatles John Lennon than Fleming's spy.) Riley also focuses closely on the quixotic personality of Kevin McClory, the Irish producer and chancer who somehow ended up with the rights to *Thunderball*. To his credit, Riley resists the temptation to demonise McClory, portraying him instead as someone so enraptured by Bond that he simply couldn't let go.

There is a subtext here about the strange fascination that Bond exercises on politicians, especially Americans. Well-chosen archive footage reminds us how much both John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan admired Bond and, in arguably his biggest coup, the director has persuaded Bill Clinton to talk on camera about his love of the British spy.

At its best, *Everything or Nothing* is both revealing and surprisingly moving. There is a very affecting account of producer Harry Saltzman at the end of his career, a diminished, almost broken man, having an emotional reunion with Cubby Broccoli at a Bond premiere. The two producers had split acrimoniously and Saltzman had caused his former partner maximum vexation by selling his shares to United Artists (the company that subsequently went bust). Even so, late in their career they realised that they'd been through too much together to maintain a grudge. Sean Connery, who played Bond in seven movies, refused to give Riley an interview, but the documentary makes clear how enraged the Scottish actor was at what he perceived was shoddy treatment by both Broccoli and Saltzman.

Everything or Nothing was made by the producers behind *Searching for Sugar Man* and *The Imposter*, two recent documentaries richer in suspense and pathos than most dramatic features. If the film doesn't reach their heights, and if it can't escape its own



Trouble in paradise: Connery, Broccoli

'official' status, it's still entertaining and enlightening viewing. Bond fans and detractors alike will find plenty of grist here. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Battsek
Simon Chinn
Written by
Stevan Riley
Co-writer
Peter Ettegui
Directors of Photography
UK Film Crew:
Gary Shaw
Nick Bennett
US Film Crew:
Richard Numeroff
Edited by
Claire Ferguson
Production Designer
Erik Ruhl
Dubbing Mixer
Matt Skilton
©Danjaq, LLC and
Metro-Goldwyn-
Mayer Studios Inc.
Production Companies
Passion Pictures
and Red Box Films
present a film by
Stevan Riley
Executive Producer
For Passion Pictures:
Andrew Ruhemann
Film Extracts

Dr. No (1962)
From Russia with Love (1963)
Golddfinger (1964)
Thunderball (1965)
You Only Live Twice (1967)
On Her Majesty's Secret Service (1969)
Diamonds Are Forever (1971)
Live and Let Die (1973)
The Man with the Golden Gun (1974)
The Spy Who Loved Me (1977)
Moonraker (1979)
For Your Eyes Only (1981)
Octopussy (1983)
A View to a Kill (1985)
The Living Daylights (1987)
License to Kill/
License to Kill (1989)
GoldenEye (1995)
Tomorrow Never Dies (1997)
The World Is Not Enough (1999)
Die Another Day (2001)

Casino Royale (2006)
Quantum of Solace (2008)
Skyfall (2012)
The Red Beret (1953)
The Black Knight (1954)
Safari (1956)
Fire down Below (1957)
The Trials of Oscar Wilde (1960)
Never Say Never Again (1983)
Austin Powers International Man of Mystery (1997)

In Colour and Black and White [1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

8,812 ft +8 frames

UK publicity title:
Everything or Nothing The Untold Story of 007

A documentary about the James Bond movie franchise. Friends and relatives of Bond author Ian Fleming discuss his long wait for the screen adaptations of his books. We hear how Albert ('Cubby') Broccoli and Harry Saltzman eventually came to make *Dr. No* (1962), the first in the series, and how Sean Connery was hired to play Bond. The rows between Connery and the producers are detailed, as are the legal disputes between *Thunderball* co-author and producer Kevin McClory and Fleming, and between McClory and Broccoli and Saltzman. Bond actors George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton, Pierce Brosnan and Daniel Craig are interviewed, as is *Skyfall* director Sam Mendes. Current producers Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli talk about the problems caused when Saltzman, who ran into financial difficulties, sold his shares in Bond to United Artists. Saltzman's children describe his eventual reconciliation with Broccoli.

Excision

USA 2011

Director: Richard Bates Jr

Certificate 18 80m 56s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Less a horror film than an offbeat teenage angst-ridden coming-of-age nightmare, 25-year-old Richard Bates Jr's debut feature *Excision* (based on his own 2008 short) is grand guignol meets *Carrie* on the set of *go210*. Setting his film in the twisted normalcy of small-town American suburbia, writer/director Bates uses black humour to dissect social alienation, sexual awakening and religious piety, revealed through the eyes of acne-prone Pauline. A maladjusted (and delusional) yet bright and determined 18-year-old, Pauline wants to teach herself to become a surgeon in order to help her perfect younger sister Grace, who suffers from cystic fibrosis. Her increasingly problematic relationship with her controlling, religious and appearance-obsessed mother will see her pushed to shocking extremes in an attempt to gain the latter's approval.

It's certainly a self-assured debut, brimming with imagination and bolstered by a smart, snappy script that deploys sarcasm to evoke the creepy side of female adolescence. Its mixing of humour with the gruesome calls to mind *Tales from the Crypt* episodes, but there are other more obvious influences to which the film pays homage, from David Cronenberg's body-horror and David Lynch's suburban surrealism to Dario Argento's raw *giallo* and Alejandro Jodorowsky's religious provocations.

AnnaLynne McCord, better known for vixen-like appearances in TV series such as *90210*, gets Pauline spot-on most of the time: a hunched, greasy-haired adolescent with a poisonous tongue, repellent but also strangely charming. Supporting cameos from the likes of Malcolm McDowell as Pauline's fed-up teacher, John Waters as the reverend who offers her spiritual counsel, and particularly Ray Wise (*Twin Peaks*) as an eerie schoolmaster add colour with their myriad film references. Particularly convincing is former porn-star Traci Lords's super-strict, image-conscious mum, who, together with a perfectly polished Ariel Winter as girl-woman Grace, provides a nuanced female



Surgical spirit: AnnaLynne McCord

Grassroots

USA 2012
Director: Stephen Gyllenhaal
Certificate 15 98m 29s

counter-presence to the all-absorbing Pauline.

We're clearly in the realms of what Barbara Creed famously referred to as "the monstrous-feminine". Admittedly, Pauline's supersaturated psychosexual nightmares are shamelessly seeking to shock, but they are also effective at puncturing the absurdity of the media images that inspire them; Pauline envisions herself as a sex goddess performing all sorts of increasingly disturbing surgical operations on herself and her peers (mostly women, dead or alive), profoundly relishing all that blood.

Just when teenage horror conventions would have Pauline either transforming into the sex bomb of her masturbatory fantasies or triumphing by virtue of her intelligence, Bates pushes her a bit further towards submission. In a macabre twist at the end, Pauline will wholeheartedly embrace her own version of conformity in order to prove herself to her mother, a clear consequence of difference subjugated under the oppressive yoke of normalcy. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Dylan Hale Lewis

Written by

Richard Bates Jr

Director of Photography

Itay Gross

Edited by

Yvonne Valdez

Steve Ansell

Production Designer

Armen Ra

Music Composed by

Mads Heldberg

Steve Damstrøll

Supervising Sound Editor

Henry Auerbach

Costume Designer

Anthony Tran

©BXR Productions
Production Company

BXR Productions

Present Executive Produced by

Robert Higginbotham

Thomas Wood Jr

Ben Uscinski

John Wasaff

Mark Linehan Bruner

Jason Herbers

Cast

AnnaLynne McCord

Pauline Traci Lords

Phyllis Ariel Winter

Grace Roger Bart

Bob Jeremy Sumpter

Adam Matthew Gray

Gubler Mr Claybaugh

Malcolm McDowell

Mr Cooper Marlee Matlin

Amber Ray Wise

Principal Campbell Matthew Fahey

Nathan Sidney Franklin

Timothy Molly McCook

Natalie Natalie Dreyfuss

Abigail John Waters

Reverend William

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

Monster Pictures

7,284 ft +0 frames

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

Based on the true story of Grant Cogswell, a scruffy young pipe-dreamer who ran for Seattle's city council in the early 2000s, Stephen Gyllenhaal's electioneering comedy *Grassroots* presents a refreshingly uncynical view of American politics on a local stage. Angered by the council's curtailment of the city's congestion-busting monorail system, Cogswell (Joel David Moore) singlemindedly puts himself forward as a candidate against African-American council member Richard McIver (Cedric the Entertainer) who, he believes, has been blinded to the efficacy of mass transportation by pressures from big business.

The stage is set for a David-and-Goliath bout between idealism and corruption. In one corner, Cogswell, with his motley entourage of unwashed skate kids, his terrible onstage presence and his ramshackle guerrilla campaign – run by unemployed journalist friend Phil Campbell (Jason Biggs). In the other, McIver, a model of composed authority and besuited gravitas. The two candidates' wildly disparate profiles are contrasted in an amusing scene at a public hearing where – waiting to deliver his pledge to the congregation – Cogswell is himself wrong-footed by McIver's mellifluous oratory.

Admirably wedded to his single issue, Cogswell is also callow, hectoring and often annoying. Gyllenhaal thereby nicely muddies the waters, toying with our kneejerk support for the underdog and underlining how far image goes in politics. As Cogswell's campaign gathers momentum, Phil's long-suffering girlfriend Emily (Lauren Ambrose) – exasperated by his dedication to a lost cause – stinging asks him where he thinks all these votes against a black candidate are coming from.

The politico's girlfriend who gets sidelined during a campaign is one cliché of the electioneering film that Gyllenhaal and his



Poll patrol: Jason Biggs, Joel David Moore

co-writers haven't managed to avoid, but the real events might have forced that one on them. The truth is apparently also responsible for what appears to be a very 'movie' moment, when Cogswell, Campbell and their growing band of supporters turn up at a venue for a polling party and discover that they've been double-booked alongside a heavy-metal performer. As the two factions agree to conduct the concert and the political function simultaneously, only the grating caricature of the caterwauling singer spoils the fun.

There's a little of Robert Altman's political miniseries *Tanner '88* (1988) in *Grassroots*. Filmed alongside the 1988 presidential primaries, Altman's series charted the rise of a wing-and-a-prayer Democrat candidate who becomes a legitimate challenger for the White House. Gyllenhaal's cuddly vision of local politics looks rather toothless in comparison, its wide-eyed optimism about the power of one individual to shake things up lacking the dash of grit or satirical bite needed to offset the Capra-corn. Never mind, *Grassroots* is an amiable and occasionally hilarious reminder that not all viable American political chancers were to the manor born. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Peggy Rajski

Michael Huffington

Matthew R. Brady

Brent Stiefel

Peggy Case

Written by

Justin Rhodes

Stephen Gyllenhaal

Based upon the book

Zioncheck for

President: A True

Story of Idealism

and Madness in American Politics

by Phil Campbell

Director of Photography

Sean Porter

Editor

Neil Mandelberg

Production Designer

Laurie Hicks

Music by/Score

Produced by

Nick Urata

Sound Mixer

Jason Alberts

Costume Designer

Ron Leaman

Executive Producers

Gary Allen Tucci

Jane Charles

Cast

Jason Biggs

Phil Campbell

Joel David Moore

Grant Cogswell

Lauren Ambrose

Emily Bowen

Cobie Smulders

Clair Tom Arnold

Tommy Todd Stashwick

Nick Ricchetti

Emily Bergl

Theresa Glendon

DC Pierson

Wayne Christopher

McDonald

Jim Tripp

Cedric the

Entertainer

Richard McIver

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

Intandem Films

8,863 ft +8 frames

Seattle, 2001. Journalist Phil Campbell is fired from his job on one of the city's newspapers. His friend Grant Cogswell tells him of his dissatisfaction with city council member Richard McIver who, he believes, has pared back the plans for the extension of Seattle's environmentally friendly monorail system due to pressure from big business. Deciding to run for office himself, Cogswell enlists Campbell as his campaign manager. Cogswell tries to rally support from monorail campaigners, but is rejected because of his offbeat image. At a council hearing, Cogswell comes face to face with McIver and is convinced that the councillor's slick speech masks corruption. Cogswell's own address is wacky and erratic but it earns him the support of some of the city's youths, who attach themselves

to his guerrilla campaign, helping to erect illegal electioneering signs along the freeways. As Cogswell begins to look like a viable candidate, Campbell becomes preoccupied with the campaign; his girlfriend Emily leaves him. When Cogswell's supporters break into McIver's offices to plaster it with posters, Campbell fires them. After a radio interview together, Campbell lambasts Cogswell for refusing to shake McIver's hand. Campbell visits McIver to apologise and the latter suggests that the opposing candidates should drive to the polls together – a gesture that initially appals Cogswell. On the day of voting, Cogswell relents and the opposing candidates share a car. Cogswell is narrowly beaten. Emily turns up at the poll party to make amends with Campbell.

Great Expectations

United Kingdom/France/USA 2012

Director: Mike Newell

Certificate 12A 128m 35s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

With 18 or so versions of *Great Expectations* made since 1917, the perennial Dickens favourite lags far behind *A Christmas Carol* and *Oliver Twist* when it comes to film. Though the plot is a relatively straightforward matter (Pip, a rustic blacksmith's apprentice, comes into a mysterious fortune and goes to London to become a gentleman), the problem of the first-person narrative is not easily overcome.

Then there's the casting issue. The deranged Miss Havisham, still living in her wedding dress among the ruins of an abandoned wedding feast, is a gift to any actor with a talent for the gothic. Ditto her fellow grotesque, the convict Magwitch. But there's a problem with Pip and what kind of actor should portray him – Pip is a version of the young Dickens himself, at his hungriest and most cruel. Not even the greatest version, made by David Lean in 1946, really got him right, played as he was by John Mills. Most productions, including the excellent BBC

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Stephen Woolley
Elizabeth Karlsen

Emanuel Michael

David Faigenblum

Screenplay

David Nicholls

Based on the novel
by Charles Dickens

Director of Photography

John Mathieson

Editor

Tariq Anwar

Production Designer

Jim Clay

Music

Richard Hartley

Production Sound Mixer

Peter Lindsay

Costume Designer

Beatrix Aruna

Pasztor

©The British Film

Institute/BBC/

Number 9 Films

(Great) Limited

Production Companies

BFI, BBC Films and

Unison Films present

in association with

HanWay Films

and LipSync

Productions an
Elizabeth Karlsen/
Stephen Woolley/
Number 9 Films

production

A film by Mike Newell

In association

with Compton

Investments

Developed by the

UK Film Council

Developed with

the assistance of

Studio Canal in

association with the

iDeal Partnership

Film Fund

With the support

of the MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union

Developed by and

made with the

support of BBC Films

Made through

BFI's Film Fund

**Executive
Producers**

Christine Langan

Zygi Kamasa

Norman Merry

Peter Hampden

Mike Newell

Ed Hart

Jana Edelbaum

Cliff Curtis

Charlotte Larson

Cast
Jeremy Irvine
Pip Pinn
Robbie Coltrane
Jaggers

**Helena Bonham
Carter**

Miss Havisham

Ralph Fiennes

Magwitch

Ewan Bremner

Wernick

Jason Flemyng

Joe Gargery

Holiday Grainger

Estella

David Walliams

Mr Pumblechook

Sally Hawkins

Mrs Joe

Olly Alexander

Herbert Pocket

Toby Irvine

young Pip

Helena Barlow

young Estella

Tamzin Outhwaite

Molly

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

11,572 ft +8 frames

The Kent marshes, early 19th century. Young orphan Pip is startled by escaped convict Magwitch, whom he assists, mainly out of fear. Magwitch is recaptured. Soon afterwards, Pip is summoned to the house of wealthy local eccentric Miss Havisham, who lives among the ruins of her unrealised wedding feast; he falls in love with Miss Havisham's beautiful ward Estella. Some years later Pip is training to become a blacksmith, but Miss Havisham's lawyer Jaggers tells him that he has come into a fortune. Pip leaves for London to be schooled as a gentleman. Having long believed that his benefactor is Miss Havisham, Pip is appalled when Magwitch reappears and reveals himself to be the source of Pip's good luck. Magwitch is chased and caught by the police. Miss Havisham dies in a fire. Now penniless, Pip reunites with Estella following the death of her brutish and wealthy husband.



Bride not to be: Helena Bonham Carter

TV series from 2011, have cast him as a kind of fop, an elongated version of the tousle-haired Olivers down the years (interestingly, Pip treads an inverse social journey to Oliver's); Michael York played him in 1974. In the original novel, for all his fine words, Pip is a bruiser, a 'Man of Kent' with huge blacksmith shoulders, big hands and a complexion certainly burnished from years beside a forge (think Ray Winstone a few years after *Scum* and you have the right look and manner). His passion for the haughty Estella is usually portrayed as a love story but it is simply an infatuation, a toxic projection of his self-hatred. Would they have been happy together, as the end of this new version suggests? It's doubtful.

Mike Newell's Pip is Jeremy Irvine (and his younger brother Toby is little Pip), late of *War Horse* and easy on the eye, and everything else conforms to the standard casting of this role: Helena Bonham Carter is Miss Havisham, Ralph Fiennes is Magwitch. Both roles, I'm afraid to say, were better served both in the Lean version and the 2011 TV adaptation – in the latter, Gillian Anderson gave Miss Havisham a sense of danger, seething like a hornet trapped in a curtain. Here, Fiennes's Magwitch feels hollow and mannered, and Bonham Carter's Havisham is an invalid, a marionette, with rather too much of the *Corpse Bride* about her. It's a shame – it's a role she seemed destined to play.

Newell's decision to open out the story to give multiple points of view has also, unfortunately, isolated Pip and exacerbated his callowness and greed – Newell is reduced to incorporating an otherwise redundant subplot about a lawyer's assistant simply because it's the only time we see Pip in a good light. Without the warm bath of Dickens's first-person narrative or, say, John Mills's natural benignity, all is lost. The scenes are too short and not especially well lit; the music is standard-issue; and the best lines are from the book. The set design is quite frankly a disaster, without any modern sense of how to stage the past, and there are scenes (such as Pip first coming to London and appearing to walk through Smithfield Market) which would be more at home in a musical. In an era of lottery-winners coming unstuck, the essential *Great Expectations* storyline seems as current as ever. Yet with its rattled 1946 realisation of England as a kind of large haunted house, the Lean remains unchallenged, and stands as a caution not to approach this deceptively simple story armed only with a sense of psychological literalism. S

The House I Live In

USA/United Kingdom/Germany/Qatar/The Netherlands/Japan/Australia 2012

Director: Eugene Jarecki, Certificate m s

Reviewed by Catherine McGahan

Eugene Jarecki's seminal *Why We Fight* (2005) brought the alleged iniquities of America's foreign policy under scrutiny. *The House I Live In* anatomises another type of warfare, that of the US government's 'War on Drugs'. Part historical inquiry, part personal story, the film analyses the impact that a century of drugs legislation is having on communities across America. A historical overview – from the time when bottled heroin, like rosewater, could be bought over the counter, through the explosion of recreational drug usage in the 1950s and 1960s and the subsequent tightening of laws in the early 1970s when the 'War on Drug Abuse' was announced by Richard Nixon – sets the context for a succession of personal accounts of drug addiction. Acres of interlaced archival footage are interspersed with thought-provoking commentary from a pantheon of writers and thinkers on the subject, including Harvard academics and *The Wire* creator David Simon, who spent years covering the drug wars for the *Baltimore Sun*.

Some arresting facts, figures and testimonies corroborate the central premise that the War on Drugs hasn't worked, and the film urges a rethink of policies. It is reported, for instance, that since the early 1970s the War on Drugs has cost \$1 trillion and resulted in more than 45 million arrests, but during that time illegal drug-taking has remained unchanged. The scale and complexity of the issues that Jarecki chooses to tackle in his work are analogous to those interrogated in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (George W. Bush's War on Terror) or *Bowling for Columbine* (gun laws). Unlike Moore, however, Jarecki prudently steers clear of populist gags and brash onscreen appearances in his appraisal of the effects of government policy on citizens. Through his softly spoken narration, he reveals how growing up in New York he became increasingly aware of the disparity of opportunity that existed between white middle-class families such as his own and families like that of his black ex-housekeeper Nannie Jeter (who was like a second mother to him). Nannie's life, it transpires, has been blighted by poverty and drug addiction, ills shown to be endemic



Crack combat: 'The House I Live In'

Laurence Anyways

Canada/France 2012

Director: Xavier Dolan

Certificate 15 168m 2s

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

Xavier Dolan's third feature finds the 23-year-old Québécois filmmaker giving ever-freer rein to his ambition. Dolan's prodigiously talented directorial debut *J'ai tué ma mère* caused a sensation at its premiere in Cannes in 2009, when the director had just turned 20; and Dolan showed no strain in following it up, with *Heartbeats* ready for unveiling at the next year's festival. Dilating his field of vision into 161 billowy minutes, Dolan's *Laurence Anyways* is the most iridescent display of his facility yet, a peacock moment of dazzle and self-assurance.

It's a sprawling romance set in Montreal during the 1990s. Busy early scenes establish an intense, claustrophobic love affair between Laurence (Melvil Poupaud) and Frédérique (Suzanne Clément), kindred spirits in their contempt for convention and banality. This scherzo-like prologue culminates in an extraordinary sequence in a carwash, where – to the violent strains of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and with rivulets of water pouring down the windscreen like floods of tears – Laurence announces to his lover that he's a woman trapped in a man's body.

As Laurence starts turning up to teach his literature class in makeup, high heels and a pencil skirt, in anticipation of an eventual sex change, the star-crossed lovers begin a tortuous, decade-long struggle with their own incompatibility. The film is oddly diffident about the physical realities of their relationship from this point on but, with each possessed of an undiminished need for the other, the liaison's death throes play out over years and against a backdrop of spectacular parties and wintry Quebec locations.

To Dolan's credit, while we are rarely far from the next flamboyant outfit, hairdo or stylish set piece, the film's human drama is never capsized by the visual excess. Though Poupaud has the showier character arc, Clément's 'Fred' is no less affecting in her anguished effort to stick by the (wo)man she loves – memorably losing her rag over brunch when a waitress makes a casual remark about Laurence's cross-dressing. Later she will be literally washed away by emotion when, now estranged from Laurence, he sends her his newly published book of poetry. Not one to let the moment pass without emphasis, Dolan deluges Fred's apartment with a tidal wave.

Such expressive maximalism will be too much for some, but this grand operatic treatment is part of the film's appeal. More damaging is its inordinate length. Stretched across nearly three hours, this tale of a love that tries to know no boundaries feels precariously distended. There is much here – an odd subplot about Laurence being taken under the wing of a family of drag queens, for example – that a director in a more disciplined mood would have left on the cutting-room floor.

When the film flags, Dolan is not above raising the temperature with a well-placed soundtrack cue, loud blasts of Beethoven, techno or 80s New Wave. Enclosed within the Academy-ratio frame, one ad-chic dance-floor tableau set to Visage's synth-pop classic 'Fade to Grey' is as exhilarating as it is unnecessary. ©



Changeling: Melvil Poupaud

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Lyse Lafontaine

Producer

Carole Mondello

Screenplay/

Dialogue

Xavier Dolan

Director of

Photography

Yves Bélanger

Editing

Xavier Dolan

Art Direction

Colombe Rabé

Original Music

Noïa

Sound

François Grenon

Sylvain Brassard

Olivier Goinard

Costumes

Xavier Dolan

Conception

Xavier Dolan

Original Costumes

François Barbeau

©Production

Laurence Inc. (a

subsidiary of Lyla

Films Inc.) / MK2 s.a./

Arte France Cinéma

Production

Companies

Lyla Films and MK2

present a film by

Xavier Dolan

A Lyla Films and

MK2 co-production

with the financial

participation of

Téléfilm Canada,

Sodec – Société

de développement

des entreprises

culturelles, Québec

– Crédit d'impôt

cinéma et télévision,

Radio-Canada

Télévision, Canada

– Crédit d'impôt

pour production

cinématographique

ou magnétoscopique

canadienne and with

the collaboration

of Super Écran –

an Astral family

member

In co-production with

Arte France Cinéma

With the

participation of

Arte France, Canal

+, Ciné + and

CNC – Ministère

de la Culture et de

la Communication

(Centre National

du Cinéma et de

l'Image Animée)

Developed with

the financial

participation of

Astral – Harold

Greenberg Fund

Produced in

collaboration with

Touscoprod

Executive Producers

Lyse Lafontaine

Joe Iacono

Xavier Dolan

Cast

Melvil Poupaud

Laurence James

Emmanuel Alia

Suzanne Clément

Frédérique

Bellair, 'Fred'

Nathalie Baye

Juliene Alia

Monia Chokri

Stéphanie Bellair

Susie Almgren

journalist

Yves Jacques

Michel Lafrance

Sophie Faucher

Andrée Bellair

Magalie Lépine-

Blondeau

Charlotte

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.33:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Network Releasing

15,123 ft +0 frames

in minority communities across America. Her story neatly bookends the film and helps link the wider political landscape to personal experience.

Beyond the liberal intelligentsia, Jarecki finds consensus among police officers, judges, prison wardens, offenders and their families, who seem only too happy to voice their frustrations with current legal systems. A young black man appears on camera shortly after he has been given a life sentence for possession of drugs by a judge, who, it transpires, does not himself agree with the laws of the state that he's obliged to comply with. The camera lingers quietly on the young boilersuit-clad felon as he processes his fate. It is moments like this that most powerfully convey the deeper realities of the system that Jarecki is calling into question. At other times the film can feel overloaded; it might have benefited from a few more long takes to give the viewer further space to contemplate the significance of the information as it unfolds.

The 'moment' I'd been hankering after is delivered in the final scene of the film, which invites us to accompany Nannie as she watches President Obama deliver his 2008 victory speech on television. Every nuance of her expression is captured as she absorbs the significance of the events being transmitted, eloquently bespeaking the complexity and tragedy of the issues addressed by the film. Jarecki makes no bones about his political remit as a filmmaker, and somehow his passion (never hectoring) and integrity of intent have the power to permeate viewers' consciousness long after they have left the cinema. ©

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Eugene Jarecki

Melinda Shopsis

Producers

Sam Cullman

Christopher St. John

Written by

Eugene Jarecki

Story Development

Christopher St. John

Directors of Photography

Sam Cullman

Derek Hallquist

Edited by

Paul Frost

Production Design

Joe Posner

Music

Robert Miller

Sound Recordists

Matthew Freed

Timothy McConvile

Arthur R. Jaso

Production Companies

Charlotte Street

Film

Programme of the

European Union

Executive Producers

Joslyn Barnes

Nick Fraser

Danny Glover

Roy Ackerman

David Alcaro

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Dogwoof

The director Eugene Jarecki is inspired by the drug-related death of a friend to make an investigative documentary about the systemic failure of America's ongoing War on Drugs. The resulting assemblage of personal testimonies, archival footage and contributions from academics, authors and drug-enforcement professionals illustrates the devastating impact that contemporary drug laws are having on minority communities throughout the US. The film concludes that while there seems to be consensus that the War on Drugs has failed, the vested interests of corporations and government in sustaining it suggest that nothing is likely to change in the near future.

Montreal, the 1990s. Schoolteacher Laurence is involved in a passionate relationship with Frédérique ('Fred'), who works in the film industry. Fred is distraught when Laurence tells her that he is a woman trapped in a man's body, and that he wants a sex-change operation. He convinces her that he's still the same person she loves, and she stands by him as he begins his transformation. Laurence starts turning up for his class dressed as a woman, and is commended for his bravery by a colleague. When he tells his mother that he is now cross-dressing, she affects lack of surprise, telling him that he never felt quite like a son to her. Sacked from his job after complaints about his appearance, Laurence is taken under the wing of a troupe of drag artists.

Some time later, Fred is married and living in Trois-Rivières when she receives a book of Laurence's published poems. She is overcome with emotion; she is subsequently reunited with Laurence and they resume their affair. Fred confesses that she once aborted their baby, after first hearing Laurence's revelation. With their relationship still untenable, the two walk out on each other during a barroom rendezvous.

Laurence has his sex-change operation. Flashbacks show him first introducing himself to Fred on a film set.

Mother's Milk

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Gerry Fox
Certificate 15 98m 25s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Despite striking production values and a reasonably prominent cast, this adaptation of the 2006 novel by Edward St Aubyn has either snubbed or been snubbed by the international festival circuit. It launched with a screening at the Hay-on-Wye literary festival and a Soho premiere attended – according to *Tatler* – by the prime minister (whose relative-by-marriage Annabel Mullion plays the part of Mary, very well), Orlando and Clemmie Fraser, the Marquess and Marchioness of Cholmondeley, Alan Hollinghurst and Alan and Philippa Yentob. Such a rarefied audience should at least be in a position to comprehend St Aubyn's preoccupations – the corrosive effects of English emotional and sexual repression, the corrupting influence of inherited wealth – if not to deal with the bitter implication that the legacy of empire in wealthy Britons constitutes an indelible residue of self-loathing, guilt and impotence.

Those familiar with St Aubyn's five-novel cycle on the Melrose family, of which *Mother's Milk* is the fourth, will know the tumultuous backstory of protagonist Patrick Melrose, the hopelessly messy and substance-dependent product of a union between a violent paedophile and a passive alcoholic. Gerry Fox's film, which he adapted with St Aubyn, downplays the family history, making Patrick seem more a straight-up bastard than a severely damaged soul – although a spirited performance by Jack Davenport, a reliable embodiment of moneyed male repression since he played the caddish Miles in Channel 4's *This Life*, also makes him the film's most engaging character. Patrick's tragedy is that just as he's grown up enough to embrace his anger with his parents and stand up for his abused child-self, his mother has collapsed into utter infirmity, robbing him of the pleasure of loathing her. He can only avenge himself by trying to scupper her dying wishes – for if there was no love in his upbringing, surely he at least deserves some of the family money? Patrick's mother Eleanor, however, has willed the lot to her Irish hippie pal Seamus – who's not above



A tear in Provence: Diana Quick, Adrian Dunbar

reminding Patrick that his whole class owes a collective debt to Ireland. The subplot of a heritage pile being handed to a gang of hippies is the sort of notion that used to power the novels of Iris Murdoch – though Fox doesn't develop it much, clearly more intrigued by the edgy interplay between the family members.

The film occasionally succumbs to the sort of knee-jerk caricatures that often mar Mike Leigh films – squalling nouveau-riche neighbours, a friend who declares French horticulture "not NEARLY as nice as an ENGLISH garden". Fox and St Aubyn didn't need to try so hard to indicate whom we should dislike, any more than cinematographer Steve Haskett needed constantly to spin the camera around the characters while they talk.

Strongly written, full of provocative ideas about class and motherhood and extremely well performed, this is a film that sometimes seems not to know its own strength; it's much better when Fox holds back on dictating audience reactions and allows us the mental space to measure for ourselves these characters' levels of autonomy, kindness, entitlement, damage. It's in its quiet moments that his film hits its emotional stride. One such is when the dying Eleanor asks of her happily oblivious baby grandson, "Does he like me?" There's no right answer, and little Thomas is soon to learn that life in his family will never be that simple. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Gerald Fox
Screenplay
Gerry Fox
Edward St Aubyn
Based on his novel
Director of Photography
Steve Haskett
Editor
John Street

Set Designer
Michel Rollant
Music Composer
David Ogilvy
Sound Recordist
John Quinn
Costume Designer
Leone Hartard
Production
©Foxy Films Ltd

Companies
Guerilla Films presents a Foxy Films production
Made with the support of the UK Film Council's Development Fund
Executive Producers
Melvyn Bragg
David Nicholas

Wilkinson
Geraldine East
Jacqueline Fox

Cast
Jack Davenport
Patrick Melrose
Annabel Mullion
Mary Melrose
Adrian Dunbar

Seamus O'Dorke
Margaret Tyzack
Eleanor Melrose
Diana Quick
Kettle
Annette Badland
Margaret
Flora Montgomery
Julia
Thomas Underhill
Robert Melrose

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Guerilla Films
8,857 ft +8 frames

Provence, the present. Englishman Patrick Melrose is staying with his wife Mary and children Robert and Thomas at the family chateau. His mother Eleanor, languishing in hospital with Alzheimer's, has willed the property to a New Age group headed by Irish hippie Seamus. Patrick and Robert resent the attention. Mary pays to baby Thomas, but also dislike the nanny, Margaret, who is fired after she falls over with the infant in her arms. Patrick tries to persuade his ailing mother to change her will, but she is only sporadically lucid. He drinks to excess and gets anti-depressants and sleeping pills from his doctor. Mary's mother Kettle and Patrick's

ex-girlfriend Julia visit; Patrick half-heartedly rekindles his relationship with Julia, while Mary and Kettle bicker. Eleanor instructs the family to sell a number of paintings to pay for a sensory-deprivation tank for the commune; Patrick considers stealing the paintings, but they turn out to be fakes. Seamus and Patrick clash over the use of the property. Patrick visits Eleanor in hospital and she asks him to help her die. He makes plans to take her to Switzerland for an assisted suicide. Mary, Robert and Patrick go to the hospital to say goodbye to Eleanor, but she changes her mind and instructs them to do nothing. Patrick resolves to visit her no more.

My Brother the Devil

United Kingdom/Egypt/USA 2012
Director: Sally El Hosaini
Certificate 15 111m 49s

Reviewed by Paul Tickell

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

It doesn't augur well. Early on in *My Brother the Devil* there's a scene with a drug-dealing gang in a car doing the London E postcodes chitchat – you've heard it all before in *Top Boy* and *Bullet Boy*. Outside the frame you sense an anthropologist on hand with a specimen jar from the University of Innit. Of course the background research is already dated, in thrall to Plan B: around these ill manors a man must go and tell it like it is, wearing his sincerity on his sleeve.

Thankfully, in her feature debut, writer-director Sally El Hosaini soon breaks free of the patois of authenticity that so often hobbles representations of the British working class in all its diversity. Her complex, even poetic portrayal of the 'badlands' of Hackney owes a lot to her actors, James Floyd as drug dealer Rashid and Fady El Sayed as his younger brother Mo. Their brilliant performances avoid those cartoons of naturalistic improvisation so associated with the around-the-hood genre. Rash is dead set against Mo adopting his own gangland lifestyle, and tensions are multiplied when Mo discovers that his big brother is gay.

The strength of the film is that it looks at brotherly love and its possible disintegration from the inside out. Thanks to the lingering cinematography, the two young men are given what is often only the prerogative of bourgeois characters: a psychology. When Rash flees following the murder of his friend Izzi, the sequence is as much about thinking as running – an accelerated impressionism. There's a similar, if slower, approach in scenes with Mo just hanging out. Taking place on a strip of green between blocks of flats, these scenes, sometimes shot into the sun, are like fleeting urban idylls. The deft use of sound and music increases the sense of being taken inside a character. Such interludes locate the individual psyche within the melting-pot of multicultural London – we get the personal mythology as well as the social maelstrom. It's a minor quibble that by the end of the film these mini-dramas of consciousness start to feel a bit predictable.

A bigger problem is Rash's gayness. This theme is treated like some debating issue, and not helped by the way Mo clothes his instinctive disgust, explaining to his circle that Rash is not quite his normal self because he's up to his neck in "terrorist shit". The film plays safe with sexuality, pulling back from the innovative, genre-bending direction it might have taken at this point: Rash's French-Arab lover Sayyid (Said Taghmaoui), looks, with the gangland stigma of a scar down his side, both erotic and tragic, like Bramante's painting of Christ at the Column. But the promise of the love that dare not speak its name roaming London Fields in the manner of Jean Genet never develops. Such a transgressive take on class, crime and sexuality – you'll find it in Joe Orton's plays – is beyond the film. Instead *My Brother* heads for the drearier shores of arthouse, with professional photographer Sayyid pontificating about framing as a form

Nativity 2 Danger in the Manger!

United Kingdom 2012, Director: Debbie Isitt
Certificate U 105m 4s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Debbie Isitt's upbeat but undistinguished follow-up to her likeable 2009 hit *Nativity!* is a dispiriting cookie-cutter copy of its predecessor. Isitt has apparently abandoned the sly social comedy of *Confetti* (2006) and *Nasty Neighbours* (2000) for TV spoofing and sentimentality, as yet again a frazzled hero (this time a strangely stiff David Tennant, doing double duty as nasty-and-nice teacher twins) reluctantly helps his underdog class take on a *Britain's Got Talent*-style showbiz challenge.

The energetic child's-eye view that made *Nativity!* engaging is still visible in the kid-centred outdoor action sequences, as the class get lost en route to the Welsh competition venue, and there's a wistful absent-father theme. But this outing isn't much of an advert for Isitt's famous commitment to improvised dialogue. Only Marc Wootton's man-child teaching assistant Mr Poppy can get his lines sparkling, fanned by his carnivalesque capering. Consequently the film is over-reliant on him for laughs, though Jessica Hynes's self-obsessed Welsh diva Angel Matthews elicits a few smirks. But an overstuffed, meandering narrative (combined with a tendency to throw in another random but button-cute musical number whenever the pace flags) means that its warm or realistic moments are lost in a welter of abseiling donkeys, forced fun and soap-opera plotting. S



Brother from another planet: James Floyd, Fady Elsayed

of truth. You really do find such characters in Hackney, but in the film he feels placed – rather like the flash motorcycle outside his industrial-space flat, he's posed not parked, a glaring prop.

Otherwise the film has real panache, particularly in its depiction of violence. In a stabbing or shooting we are thrust into the action and yet time stops, the editing both kinetic and contemplative. It's another example of how the film eschews stodgy realism. It's also light on its feet when it comes to the supporting cast, especially gang

member Repo. Aymen Hamdouchi's half-human, half-reptile performance captures both the brutality of his underworld and a fragility born of paranoia: mind your back.

Drugs fuel this relentless introspection in a paranoid hall of mirrors. It's a violent narcissism but accompanied by a humour that's only ever a chortle away from a gun drawn. Few films allow its spear-carriers this degree of attention. *My Brother the Devil* is worth seeing for this alone – it gives its characters the benefit of a soul even if they are damned and nasty with it. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Gayle Griffiths
Julia Godzinskaya
Michael Sackler

Written by

Sally El Hosaini

Director of Photography

David Raedecker

Editor

Iain Kitching

Production Designer

Stéphane Collonge

Music

Stuart Earl

Sound Designer

Jovan Ajder

Costume Designer

Rob Nicholls

©Blood Brothers Films Ltd. (UK)

Production Companies

A Wild Horses Film Company and Rooks Nest Entertainment production
In association

with Film Clinic
With additional support from the Sundance Institute/Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art grant

Developed with the support of the Babylon programme
Developed with the assistance of Rawi Screenwriters' Lab in consultation with the Sundance Institute

Executive Producers Mohamed Hefzy
Sally El Hosaini

Cast

Saïd Taghmaoui
Sayid
James Floyd
Rashid
Fady Elsayed
Mo
Aymen Hamdouchi
Repo

Ashley Thomas
Lenny
Anthony Welsh
Izzi
Arnold Oceng
AJ
Letitia Wright
Aisha
Amira Ghazalla
Hanan
Elarica Gallacher
Vanessa
Nasser Memarzia
Abdul-Aziz
Leemore Marrett Jr

Demon
Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures
10,063ft +8 frames

Hackney, East London, the present. Drug dealer Rashid ('Rash') and his younger brother Mo live in cramped accommodation with their Egyptian parents on a housing estate. Rash disapproves when Mo starts to follow in his footsteps and joins a gang. Mo is mugged in the course of a small-time drug deal – his teenage muggers work for Demon, the leader of a rival gang. When Demon and some of the gang show up at the local shop, Mo calls Rash. In the ensuing fight, Rash's friend Izzi is stabbed and killed by Demon. Rash tries to avenge the death by shooting Demon in a tattoo parlour, but loses his nerve. He wants to quit the gang and is in further turmoil because, in spite of having a girlfriend, Vanessa, he is gay. He's fallen for one of his drug customers, French-Arab photographer Sayyid. The gang will only allow Rash his 'freedom' if he kills Demon. The next attempt is also a failure because it's a set-up, a smokescreen for Rash's own gang to try to kill him. He escapes and goes into hiding. Gang leader Repo tracks him down to Sayyid's studio by using Mo as an unwitting decoy. Mo is shot by Repo in the confrontation but recovers from the near-fatal wound. Rash gets his new life. Mo, after initial disgust, accepts Rash as gay; the brothers' bond is now even deeper.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nick Jones
Written by
Debbie Isitt

Director of Photography

Sean Van Hales

Editor

Nicky Ager

Production Designer

Chris Roope

Original Songs and Music

Nicky Ager

Debbie Isitt

Production Sound Mixer

John Taylor

Costume Designer

Stephanie Collie

One presents in association with Creative England, Premiere Picture and with Media Pro Six a Mirrorball Films production

A Debbie Isitt film

Made with the support of Creative England

Made in association with Premiere Picture

Developed with the support of the UK Film Council's Film Fund

Film Fund

Executive Producers

Laurence Brown

Jason Garrett

Alex Hamilton

Dan Lawson

Gary Phillips

David Rogers

Mark Vennis

Entertainment

One presents in association with Creative England, Premiere Picture and with Media Pro Six a Mirrorball Films production

A Debbie Isitt film

Made with the support of Creative England

Made in association with Premiere Picture

Developed with the support of the UK Film Council's Film Fund

Film Fund

Executive Producers

Laurence Brown

Jason Garrett

Alex Hamilton

Dan Lawson

Gary Phillips

David Rogers

Mark Vennis

Cast

David Tennant

David/Roderick Peterson

Marc Wootton

Mr Poppy

Jason Watkins

Gordon Shakespeare

Joanna Page

Mrs Peterson

Ian McNeice

Mr Peterson's dad

Rosie Cavaliero

Miss Rye

Jessica Hynes

Angel Matthews

Pam Ferris

Mrs Bevan

Dolby Digital In Colour

Distributor

E1 Films

9,456 ft +0 frames

The Midlands, the present. At St Bernadette's primary school, childlike teaching assistant Mr Poppy ropes unwilling supply teacher David Peterson into a secret attempt at winning the Song for Christmas national singing competition. Snooty rivals from Oakmoor School ensure that the St Bernadette's group gets lost en route to the Welsh venue – Christmas Castle – leading to a gruelling hike, impromptu river-rafting and a dramatic mountain rescue. When David's twin brother, celebrity choirmaster Roderick, tries to scupper both schools' chances, the Oakmoor team allow St Bernadette's to take their place on stage to triumphant applause. David's wife gives birth to twins in the castle's barn and he is reconciled with his repentant brother.

Not Dead Yet

USA 2012
Director: Jesse Vile



A new key: Jason Becker, Marty Friedman

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

On grainy home video, a kid with a poodle haircut goofs around with an acoustic guitar, indulging in mock-heroics as enthusiastic strumming morphs into a good-natured version of 'Mr Tambourine Man'. We cut to more vintage footage of the same young man tearing it up on stage with his own metal band, cascades of notes dashed off with a theatrical flourish. Later, we see him a little bit older, even more confident, picking his way through the multilayered counterpoint of a Paganini Caprice in an instructional guitar video. Musically then, Jason Becker's journey is one of startling contrasts, and as this compassionate, thorough documentary makes affectingly clear, such has also been his life experience.

Having first come into the spotlight with the speed-metal band Cacophony when he was still in high school in California, and having released his debut solo album before he was out of his teens, Becker made his breakthrough into the big time in 1989 when he replaced revered guitarist Steve Vai in the David Lee Roth Band. In the midst of his first recording sessions with the band, however, came the hammer blow: having sought medical advice for a knee twinge that was impairing his balance, he was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, an incurable motor neurone condition popularly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Before long, unable to hold a guitar, he quit the band and left behind his dreams of a high-profile stadium-filling tour.

First-time director Jesse Vile has painstakingly assembled a wealth of archive footage and he makes effective use of it, contrasting the sight of Becker in his first wheelchair with images of him as a toddler being pushed around the garden in a wheelbarrow by his dad. It's a moment that adds emotional impact but stays just the right side of crass overemphasis – which can also be said of the way the film as a whole balances the terrible sadness of Becker's plight with the inspirational courage he's shown in battling its ominously debilitating effects. Suffering virtual paralysis from the neck down – though his current girlfriend cheerily assures us the erectile function still works fine – Becker has been able to continue to communicate through eye movements (thanks to a unique eye-signing system developed by indefatigable dad Ray), even recording a solo

album of surprisingly lyrical music through the wonders of computer programming.

Unfolding in largely chronological order, with just one brief early shot of Becker in his current condition, and boasting an extensive roster of interviewees ranging from childhood friends to esteemed musos such as Steve Vai and Megadeth's Marty Friedman, the result is undeniably poignant in its depiction of a fresh-faced, energetic youth reduced to involuntary near-stasis. Like its subject, though, the film refuses to get too lachrymose or indulge in self-pity. Becker is a remarkable individual, and the film does him justice. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jesse Vile	Production Company Opus Pocus Films presents	Joshua Rodriguez Macks Schmitt Mark Shawn Eduardo Adonias de Sousa Harumi Thatcher Matt Touchard
Director of Photography Carl Burke	Executive Producers Vinni Arora Bronson Buskett John Crawley Terry Farmakis Joanne Fishburn Cesar Gueikian Oli Harbottle Dennis Joyce Thomas Kapinos Michal Kubicki Andreas Melve Georg Norberg	In Colour [1:85:1]
Editor Gideon Gold	Distributor Dogwoof	UK publicity title Jason Becker Not Dead Yet
Original Score Michael Lee Firkins		
Songs and Guitar Jason Becker		
Sound Design/Supervising Sound Editor Dario Swade		
Opus Pocus Films (USA) LLC		

A documentary portrait of American rock musician Jason Becker, tracing a career of early promise subsequently affected by serious illness. Born in 1969 and raised in California, Becker was a virtuoso guitarist by the time he was a teenager. While still in high school he sent a demo tape to producer Mike Varney, who teamed him with future Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman to form the metal band Cacophony. After two albums and a tour, Jason embarked on a solo career, and in 1989 landed the coveted guitar slot in the David Lee Roth Band. While the band was recording a new album, however, Becker's impaired balance led to a diagnosis of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, an incurable degenerative motor neurone disease which prevented him from finishing the sessions. Confined to a wheelchair and no longer able to play guitar, he continued to make music using specially adapted computer systems to realise his complex classical-influenced rock compositions, culminating in the release of the album Perspective in 1995. With the help of family, friends and lovers, he continues to write music today.

Paranormal Activity 4

USA 2012
Directors: Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman
Certificate 15 87m 37s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Like the *Saw* series, whose annual spot in the release schedules it has usurped, the *Paranormal Activity* franchise boasts a complex narrative structure, with sequels filling in backstory or offering parallel events. This fourth instalment, like *Paranormal Activity 3* put together by the *Catfish* team of Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, is the first entry to be an actual sequel, picking up on the shock finishes of the first two films, in which protagonist Katie – series star Katie Featherston, who now only has to pop up smiling to produce a frisson – was a) possessed and b) seen abducting her nephew for satanic purposes.

Given that series horrors depend more on shocks than surprises, there's one cunning bit of misdirection. The very unsettling Brady Allen seems to be the abducted nephew, twisted by the schemes of his demon aunt and the cult introduced in the last sequel – but the story turns round and points the finger elsewhere. A continuing theme is that the paranormal activity is targeted rather than random, with this year's protagonists caught – in a manner that can be explained in the next sequel – in the ongoing story of demon Toby and his human associates. By now, the formula is defined enough for the filmmakers to poke fun at it – the teenagers here (especially Kathryn Newton's bright, canny heroine) are more playful about surveillance and ghost-hunting than the grown-ups of earlier films, but in the end just as doomed. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jason Blum Oren Peli	©Paramount Pictures Corporation Katie	Katie Featherston Katie
Production Companies Christopher Landon	Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital Sound	
Story Chad Feehan Based on the film <i>Paranormal Activity</i> by Oren Peli	In Colour [1:85:1]	
Director of Photography Doug Emmett	Distributor Paramount Pictures UK	
Executive Producers Akiva Goldsman Steven Schneider Christopher Landon	7,885 ft +8 frames	
Edited by Gregory Plotkin		
Production Designer Jennifer Spence		
Sound Design/Supervision Peter Brown		
Costume Designer Leah Butler		
Visual Effects and Animation Industrial Light & Magic		
Stunt Co-ordinator James Armstrong		
Cast Kathryn Newton Alex Matt Shively Ben Aiden Lovekamp Wyatt Brady Allen Robbie Stephen Dunham Doug Alexondra Lee Holly		

Henderson, Nevada, 2011. Teenager Alex is spooked by Robbie, an odd child who moves into the house across the street. Alex's parents agree to look after Robbie while Katie, his mother, is supposedly in hospital. After inexplicable phenomena occur, Alex persuades her boyfriend Ben to hook up cameras around the house, to keep track of paranormal nocturnal events. Alex's adopted younger brother Wyatt is in fact Katie's nephew Hunter, whom she abducted after being possessed by a demon and murdering his real parents. Toby, an invisible demon, murders Alex's parents and Ben. Alex runs to Katie's house, intent on rescuing her brother, only to be attacked by Katie and a horde of possessed people.

People like Us

USA 2012

Director: Alex Kurtzman
Certificate 12A 114m 27s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

When he turned 30, screenwriter Alex Kurtzman (co-creator of sci-fi TV show *Fringe*) met his half-sister at a party, having previously been unaware of her existence. Hence the deceptive opening titles of Kurtzman's directorial debut: "Inspired By True Events."

This seriously misguided effort bears as much relation to reality as a slasher film with the same stock come-on. Kurtzman's alter ego is Sam (Chris Pine), a motor-mouthed salesman whose good looks and too-easy success are an indicator that he clearly knows the price of everything and the value of nothing and needs to be taken down a peg. When he returns to Los Angeles for the funeral of his long-estranged record-producer dad — who's credited with, among other things, discovering Kajagoogoo and giving Elvis Costello "his first pair of ugly glasses" — Sam discovers that he has an impoverished half-sister, Frankie (Elizabeth Banks). Dad has left \$150,000 in cash for her; should Sam give it to her or keep it to bail himself out of debt?

Sam's girlfriend Hannah (Olivia Wilde) is clear: giving the money to Frankie is the right thing to do. But instead of introducing himself to Frankie, Sam stalks her. Repeatedly engineering meetings with her and promising to never, ever hit on her, he befriends her troubled son Josh (Michael Hall D'Addario). Josh asks if Sam is a child molester — but doesn't mind when Sam buys him an intro-to-post-punk's worth of albums at the original Rhino Records. ("We're going to start with Gang of Four, then you'll move to the Buzzcocks, then Joy Division, then The Clash, then we'll finish up with Television.")

Sam has cold feet about confronting the sister who was economically shunted aside in favour of "the family up the hill", but there's still no plausible or acceptable reason for his behaviour. Reasonably, Frankie doesn't accept his claims that this perfect stranger — whose constant appearances quickly destroy the illusion of coincidence — is merely a non-sexually-interested moral cheerleader willing to say reassuring things like "There's nothing



Sister pact: Michelle Pfeiffer

wrong with you." Since Sam can't hit on Frankie, his growing emotional investment must presumably be laudably disinterested. It should be refreshing to see a film in which getting the girl isn't the predictable reward for moral reform, but instead it's creepy. (Infatuated Frankie, predictably and rightly, is furious when she discovers Sam's identity.)

The stench of nauseating, only-in-LA narcissism pervades the film beyond Sam's constant self-pity. There is, for example, an awful moment when Sam and mother Lillian (Michelle Pfeiffer) reconcile. "Maybe we can both learn to be..." she begins. "Be people!" he finishes. Then they laugh gently, with a tear behind the smile — it's a sub-sub-Ozu moment that makes 'humanism' a bad joke. Or witness Frankie's confession to a random AA group about her reaction on discovering not that her dad is dead, but that she didn't get a mention in his obit. "I didn't think the editors at the *Los Angeles Times* would be bigger pricks than my dad was," she fumes like an angry publicist. "I feel numb. Nothing." Viewers should be so lucky. ✖

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Roberto Orci
Bobby Cohen
Clayton Townsend

Written by

Alex Kurtzman
Roberto Orci
Jody Lambert

Director of Photography

Salvatore Totino

Film Editor

Robert Leighton

Production Designer

Ida Random

Music

A.R. Rahman

Production Sound Mixer

Peter J. Devlin

Costume Designer

Mary Zophres

©DreamWorks II
Distribution Co., LLC

Production Companies

DreamWorks

Pictures and Reliance Entertainment present a K/O Paper Products production

Executive Producer

Alex Kurtzman

Cast

Chris Pine

Sam

Elizabeth Banks

Frankie

Michael Hall D'Addario

Josh

Michelle Pfeiffer

Lillian

Olivia Wilde

Hannah

Mark Duplass

Ted

Sara Morell

Dr Amanda

Philip Baker Hall

Ike Rafferty

Dean Chekvala

Jerry

Barbara Eve Harris Mrs Haney

Dolby Digital/
Datasat Digital
Sound/SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor

Buena Vista International (UK)

10,300 ft +8 frames

New York, the present. Corporate barterer Sam finds himself in trouble when a deal goes badly wrong and he faces losing his job. Returning home, he's told by girlfriend Hannah that his father has died. He reluctantly attends the funeral in Los Angeles, where his father's lawyer gives him a shaving bag filled with \$150,000 in cash and instructions that the money is for someone called Josh Davis. Going to the address listed in the note, Sam finds that Josh is a young boy. Sam follows Josh's mother Frankie to her Alcoholics Anonymous meeting; listening to her speaking during the meeting, Sam realises that she is in fact his half-sister. Upset at Sam's behaviour, Hannah returns to New York.

Engineering repeated meetings, Sam grows close to Frankie and Josh, though he promises Frankie that he'll never make romantic advances. Confronting his mother, Sam learns that she made his father choose between Frankie's mother and her. Sam reveals his identity to Frankie, who's furious with him. Sam decides to stay in Los Angeles. Later, he shows Frankie a home movie shot by their father in which they're seen playing together as children.

The Pool

USA 2007

Director: Chris Smith

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

Now that's a big old gap between premiere and release. Chris Smith's *The Pool* emerged on the festival circuit in 2007, when it took a Special Jury Prize at Sundance and garnered admiring reviews. However, in these troubled times for arthouse distribution, even a known director with a good haul of awards under his belt (for *American Job*, *American Movie*, *Home Movie* and *The Yes Men*) isn't guaranteed a route to the international market, especially if his or her project doesn't fit easily into a commercial pigeonhole. And this story of hardworking street kids forging their way in the world made its debut even before *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) had unexpectedly spun such material into box-office gold...

Like *Slumdog*, *The Pool* emphasises the resilience and resourcefulness of India's worker waifs, although it's gentler on their wealthy employers: through the dejected bourgeois Nana, his angsty daughter Ayesha and their shimmering unused swimming pool, Smith emphasises the fact that money doesn't secure contentment. Indeed, there's an implication that troubled introspection is an inevitable penalty of privilege. Ayesha's affected malaise (she's reading a book entitled *Young and Depressed in China: Drugs and Screwed-Up Kids*) is a source of curiosity rather than concern to her new friends, Jhangir and Venkatesh, who look after themselves and scrape a living on the street. They ask about her "grumpy face" in the same breath as praising her fancy jeans. Venkatesh, by contrast, relates the traumas of his life — possession by a demon, kidnap by a western sex tourist — with breezy amusement.

Pitting the streetwise poor against the fragile, effete posh in this way risks sentimental condescension, and certainly there is an old-fashioned simplicity to this narrative of envy, aspiration and unexpected connection. On accepting the role of Nana, the famed Bollywood actor Nana Patekar reportedly declared that the script reminded him of "what we used to do before we got corrupted"; the fact that the short story by Randy Russell from which it is adapted was set in Iowa indicates its flexibility as a fable. It could have been told at any point in cinema history, about inhabitants of almost any country — anywhere, that is, with a striking



Deep end: Venkatesh Chavan

 gap between rich and poor. Its delightful scenes of young scamps on the make draw on the reliable appeal of the precocious kid-hustler beset by adult woes (tiny entrepreneur Jhangir hasn't slept because two customers gave him trouble late at night; when Venkatesh advises him to call the police, he wearily rejoins, "They were the police"), while Nana's swimming pool and lushly irrigated garden are unmissable emblems of unthinking privilege. It's all a little on-the-nose: you could hardly begrudge the sad rich man and the happy pauper their productive exchange of energies, and either of the endings that Smith sets up – Venkatesh's embrace of educational opportunities or his return home to his family – promises the satisfaction of loose ends secured. But Smith's confident touch in directing his actors, his own strikingly warm and vibrant cinematography, and the well-judged gaps he allows in his story all make for a pleasing package that shouldn't have taken five years to reach UK cinemas. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Kate Noble
Written by
Chris Smith
Randy Russell

Based on a short story by
Randy Russell
Photographed by
Chris Smith

Edited by
Barry Polterman

Composed by
Noisola
Didier Leplae
Joe Wong

Sound

Didier Leplae
©The Pool Film LLC
Production Company
Bluemark presents

Cast

Venkatesh Chavan
Venkatesh
Jhangir Badshah

Jhangir

Ayesha Mohan

Ayesha

Malcolm Faria

Malcolm

Nana Patekar

Nana, Ayesha's Dad

Keshav Dalasi

room boy

Vijesh Naik

desk clerk

Sheikh Abdul

Gaffar

bag seller

Mahesh Gowas

boy in alley

Mr Prakash

laundry guy

Dolby

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Blue Dolphin Films

Panjim, Goa, the present. Eighteen-year-old Venkatesh returns from a visit to his home village and resumes his work routine, cleaning hotel rooms and selling plastic bags on the street with his younger friend Jhangir. He becomes preoccupied with a holiday home that has a gorgeous swimming pool, and then with the Mumbai family that owns it: a severe middle-aged man, Nana, and his teenage daughter Ayesha; they don't get on, and don't seem to enjoy the luxury in which they live. Plastic bags are banned, compromising the boys' income. Venkatesh talks himself into a job helping Nana out in his garden. He and Jhangir befriend Ayesha. While working on the garden, Venkatesh regales Nana with stories from his eventful life. It becomes apparent that the pool itself has tragic significance for the family. When Venkatesh mentions that he wishes he could have gone to school, Nana offers to take him back to Mumbai and pay for him to be educated. Venkatesh and Jhangir fall out and Jhangir tells Ayesha that Venkatesh used to watch her secretly, and is only interested in her family because he wants access to their pool.

Venkatesh returns to his home village again, and his mother tries to persuade him to stay and care for her. Back in Panjim he reconnects with Nana and Ayesha. He watches the children starting school. Among them is Jhangir, who has enrolled under Venkatesh's name; they greet each other warmly. Nana and Ayesha leave for Mumbai. Venkatesh sits by their pool.

The Prophet

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Gary Tarn

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

"What are your possessions," asks Almustafa, the titular narrator of Kahlil Gibran's 1923 book *The Prophet*, "but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow?" Or even this afternoon, if this weather keeps up. As read by Thandie Newton over Gary Tarn's images, Gibran's perennial bestseller is easy to mock, but only at first. Over time it becomes intolerably sanctimonious. "Work is love made visible, and if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy." Gibran, who won the patronage of a succession of Boston society figures, pulled it off – so what's holding you back?

The frame story for these sententious platitudes is that Almustafa is about to depart the made-up city of Orphalese for the unnamed isle of his birth when he is prevailed on by the locals to make an epic going-away speech, covering "all that has been shown you of that which is between birth and death". Orphalese is a non-specific kind of place: it has priests and priestesses but no named religion; it is advanced enough to have a division of labour into merchants and weavers and so on, but not a spinning jenny; its most pressing concerns, going by the questions asked of Almustafa by his listeners, include self-knowledge but not war.

Tarn doesn't show Orphalese directly, but has sought to build a comparably indistinct Panopolis out of decontextualised shots of modern cities, from Belgrade, Jaipur and New York to Gibran's native Lebanon, often concentrating on their inhabitants' faces, as if they are receiving Almustafa's sermon along with the film's audience. What seems meant to evoke universality across oceans and borders has in practice a homogenising effect, defoliating cultures and eviscerating histories. Orphalese may be at peace and outside time, but the locales in the film visibly are not. The use of shots of bombed-out buildings in wherever gives the fatuous impression that if only Almustafa were heard by whoever, mankind's manifest ills might be healed.

Tarn's footage has been desaturated, Instagram-style, reinforcing the depressing yet – for better and worse – spurious sense of global uniformity. This, together with prosaic tricks such as upside-down shots, negative shots and shots run backwards, contributes to the gap-year-video feel already established by the narration and the New Agey score of twinkly arpeggios, electronic



Sight-seer: 'The Prophet'

pulses and tasteful string textures. *The Prophet* is the non-narrative equivalent of 'we are the world' films such as *Babel* (2006), without even their sense of conflict. It's easy to present people as interchangeable if they aren't given voices, and Tarn's specimens, there to illustrate a numinous idea, reveal almost nothing of themselves.

Mostly Tarn's vagueness is innocuous enough, but when Almustafa talks about freedom over shots of an unidentified demonstration, it's a problem. Almustafa is characteristically anti-political or apolitical – you can only be free "when you cease to speak of freedom as a goal and a fulfilment", he says – but the flag-waving demonstrators aren't. What they believe matters.

Like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Prophet* was given an unforeseen second life when it was taken up by the 1960s counterculture, and while they are frequently authoritarian, Almustafa's aphorisms offer ample fuel for the hippies' cult of blissful mindlessness. By talking, he says, "thinking is half murdered", while "there are those who have the truth within them, but they tell it not in words". Tarn does at least draw attention to the irony of these words by showing Newton mouthing them, but the sentiment remains, and the cosmic naughtiness of Gibran's prose ("verily", "I say unto you") is positively revered.

Perhaps the most revealing passage comes when, in his chapter on buying and selling, Almustafa discusses art. All needs are met in the Almustafan market, so long as traders act out of "kindly justice", but he asks them to look out for "the singers and the dancers and the flute players", since "that which they bring, though fashioned of dreams, is raiment and food for your soul". Under the gauzes of mysticism, a core of conformism and utility. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Gary Tarn
Original English Language Text

Abridged from *The Prophet* written by Khalil Gibran

Cinematography

Gary Tarn

Edited by

Gary Tarn

Music Composed and Performed by

Gary Tarn
Voice Recording
Peter Watts

@Land Media Productions Ltd

Production Company

A film by Gary Tarn
A Land Media production

Executive Producer

BJ Cunningham

narration
Thandie Newton

In Colour and Black and White [2.35:1]

Distributor

ICO/City Screen

A reading of excerpts from Kahlil Gibran's 1923 book The Prophet, accompanied by specially composed music, over footage filmed in a variety of locations across the world, including Gibran's native Lebanon and his adoptive home New York. Over these images, a narrator tells the story of the prophet Almustafa. Soon to leave the city of Orphalese, where he has lived for 12 years, and return to the place of his birth, Almustafa is entreated by the seeress Almitra to give a valedictory sermon. He expounds his views on fundamental themes in a series of precepts and homilies.

Radioman

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Mary Kerr

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"Radioman is a cultural institution. You get on first-name terms with Radioman, you know you've made it," attests Tom Hanks. He's just one of a mass of movie stars delivering generous testimonials to Craig Castaldo, aka Radioman, the unofficial mascot of New York film sets, in Mary Kerr's quirky character study. The film, like its subject, is genial and prone to rambling, with an eye for a good quote, as it follows the garrulous Radioman closely on his daily round, cycling from one film shoot to another. Visually raw – Radioman wields the camera at points, to no great effect or added authenticity – but editorially rather more sophisticated, it is both a celebration of his bizarre role in the industry (he's had small parts in more than a hundred movies, and gets his name from the radio he wears on a string around his neck) and a commentary on the gulf between celebrity and civilian.

At its heart is the merciless asymmetry that separates the man in the street from the movie star in the trailer, no matter how many friendly greetings are exchanged or pictures taken. Stars such as George Clooney, Johnny Depp and Meryl Streep ("He's the most loyal, loving movie guy there is") line up to pay affectionate if woolly tributes to Radioman, but Sting's insight ("He's like a Beckett character – like something out of *Waiting for Godot*") is more telling. Seeing Radioman proudly assemble his trademark props, or hail Robin Williams with a cheerful "Hello, movie-whore!" in a cod-Irish accent, one wonders whether he's simply performing the outsize character of Radioman, just as they are politely performing friendship on camera.

When it's at its best, Kerr's film is a tale of two cities. It deftly noses out the tale of Radioman's transition from homeless alcoholic to New York film fixture, but is clear-eyed about why his onscreen bid to crash the Los Angeles Oscar parties fails bitterly. For all their bonhomie, many of his celebrity 'friends' barely recognise him in LA – when he is out of his context as a New York character, he is literally out of sight. In an attempt to return him to visibility, Kerr pores over some of his blink-and-you'll-miss-them appearances in films such as *Godzilla*, *The Departed* and *Shutter Island* (someone is doubtless constructing a drinking game out of them). Without satirising his own view of his career ("I'm a lucky charm for them"), the film shows the wide disparity between Radioman's fleeting appearances on screen and his fervent hopes for bigger roles. We've seen this before (2007's *Strictly Background* highlighted the travails of the professional extra) but there's real pathos in the forensic examination of how Radioman's bit part in *Remember Me* (2010) is pared away to a mere glimpse.

Wriggling into his Brooklyn house, rendered almost unliveable by hoarded movie souvenirs, the film finally coaxes Radioman into recalling a life destroyed by drink but rescued by on-set camaraderie. After a seemingly endless succession of well-intentioned movie-star banalities about Radioman's possible motivation, Tilda Swinton puts her finger on it, when she identifies what he shares with many actors: when he gets on the set, he has come home. ☺



Face in the crowd: Craig Castaldo

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Paul Fischer
Cinematography
Mary Kerr
Edited by
Gary Forrester
Original Music
Julia Newmann
Cody Westheimer
Sound Recording
Colin Alexander

©Ten Cent Adventures Ltd
Production Company
A Ten Cent Adventure

Film Extracts
Bonfire of the Vanities (1990)
The Departed (2006)
Enchanted (2004)
The Fisher King (1991)
Godzilla (1998)
Jersey Girl (2004)
Keeping the Faith (2001)

Little Nicky (2001)
Miss Congeniality (2000)
Mr. Deeds (2002)
Remember Me (2010)
Snake Eyes (1998)
Spider-Man 3 (2007)
Shutter Island (2010)
Two Weeks Notice (2004)

With
Radioman
Josh Brolin
Vince Burns
George Clooney
Matt Damon
Tina Fey
Whoopi Goldberg
Tom Hanks
Larry Holzer
Ron Howard
Jeff Kaplan
Shia LaBeouf
Jude Law
Herb Lieberman

Eva Mendes
Helen Mirren
Alfred Molina
Joel Schumacher
Steven Soderbergh
Sting
Meryl Streep
Trudie Styler
Tilda Swinton
Robin Williams
Johnny Depp
Ridley Scott
Anne Hathaway

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Ten Cent Adventures

Formerly homeless movie-mad eccentric Craig Castaldo, known as 'Radioman', has become a fixture on New York film sets, appearing as an extra in more than a hundred movies. Actors including Robin Williams, Josh Brolin, Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, George Clooney and Johnny Depp explain their affection for him. Radioman films his daily routine touring multiple sets, and discusses his hunger for bigger roles, his descent into alcoholism and homelessness in the 1980s, and how joining in the movie community saved him. He discusses his fleeting performances in films such as *The Departed*, *Shutter Island*, *Remember Me* and *Godzilla*. A visit to Los Angeles to try to see his celebrity friends at the 2009 Oscar parties ends in failure. Back in New York, Tilda Swinton, Whoopi Goldberg, Helen Mirren, Matt Damon and others muse on how Radioman found a home in movies. Radioman returns to roaming the city's movie sets.

Ray Harryhausen Special Effects Titan

USA 2012, Director: Gilles Penso

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Clearly a labour of love by all concerned (profits are going to the Ray and Diana Harryhausen Foundation to support the preservation of Ray Harryhausen's archive), this immensely engaging portrait of the man John Landis calls "the only technician who is an auteur" superficially resembles an extended DVD extra, in that it combines an extensively illustrated look at the career of the pioneering stop-motion and special-effects expert with regular interjections from breathless fans.

The difference here is that the fans include Tim Burton, James Cameron, Peter Jackson, Nick Park, Steven Spielberg and many others, all of them only too happy to emphasise their immense creative debt to the man who more or less embodied the special-effects-driven fantasy and sci-fi genre for more than four decades (Harryhausen's professional career spans *George Pal Puppetoons* from the late 1930s to 1981's *Clash of the Titans*), at a time when both budgets and serious critical attention were in much shorter supply. This is demonstrated not just verbally but through comparative clips, revealing that while the dinosaurs in Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) benefited from technology that Harryhausen never dreamed of, they remain Harryhausen creations at base, moving in a decidedly familiar way.

The nonagenarian Harryhausen has the lion's share of screen time, combining affectionate anecdotes with detailed technical explanations – he reveals, for instance, that *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) was hampered both by the San Francisco authorities disapproving of the very notion of a giant octopus being able to pull down the Golden Gate Bridge, and the octopus in question having only six tentacles, to keep costs down (Harryhausen called it "the sixtopus"). He also reveals that the legendary skeletons in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) were originally conceived as rotting zombies but were cleaned up to avoid a commercially prohibitive X certificate. His archive of some 50,000 items has been extensively plundered, with designs, storyboards, armatures, models and test footage all pressed into service to ensure that visual interest is maintained even in those occasional cases where clip rights couldn't be cleared. *Clash of the Titans* is the most glaring absentee – a particular shame given not only Harryhausen's evident pride in his work on the Medusa but also the fact that it was his swan song.

There's some context (Gustave Doré, Georges Méliès and Harryhausen's mentor Willis O'Brien are cited as major influences) but the film mainly focuses on Harryhausen and his collaborators, including his parents (father Fred made the mechanical armatures until the 1960s, mother Martha the clothes for his 1940s fairytale films), long-term producer Charles H. Schneer and composer Bernard Herrmann. Meanwhile actor John Cairney (*Hylas in Jason and the Argonauts*) puts in an exaggeratedly plaintive word for the people no one ever remembers from Harryhausen's films despite them sharing screen space with his creatures (Harryhausen bristles at the notion that they're 'monsters').

 Above all, the film stresses the extraordinary alchemy behind Harryhausen's best creations, with his successors Dennis Muren and Phil Tippett among those trying to explain the conundrum that his largely one-man achievements, made with technology dating back to Méliès, nonetheless seem more convincingly 'alive' than any number of contemporary CGI creations. A hagiography? Undoubtedly, but in the context of someone who has brought Greek myths to such memorably vivid life, it's worth noting that the term's linguistic origins mean 'a saint's biography', and Harryhausen's secular canonisation was completed long before his star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame was unveiled in 2003. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Alexandre Ponct

Written by

Gilles Penso

Editing

Gilles Penso

Original Music

Alexandre Ponct

Sound Mixing

Lionel Guenoun

©Freneticarts,

The Ray and Diana

Harryhausen

Foundation

Production Companies

Frenetic Arts and

The Ray & Diana

Harryhausen

Foundation present

Film Extracts

Alice in Wonderland

(2010)

Avatar (2009)

The Beast from

20,000 Fathoms

(1953)

District 9 (2009)

Earth vs. the Flying

Saucers (1956)

First Men in the

Moon (1964)

The Golden Voyage

of Sinbad (1973)

It Came from

beneath the

Sea (1955)

Jason and the

Argonauts (1963)

Jurassic Park (1992)

King Kong (1933)

King Kong (2005)

The Lost World

Jurassic Park (1997)

Mars Attacks! (1996)

Mighty Joe

Young (1949)

Monsters, Inc.

(2001)

Mysterious

Island (1961)

One Million Years

B.C. (1966)

Pirates of the Caribbean The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003)

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958)

Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger (1977)

Spider-Man 2 (2004)

Starship Troopers (1997)

Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith (2005)

The 3 Worlds of Gulliver (1960)

20 Million Miles to Earth (1957)

The Valley of Gwangi (1969)

Le Voyage dans la lune (1902)

Ray Harryhausen shorts

The Story of Hansel and Gretel (1952)

The Story of Rapunzel (1952)

The Story of King Midas (1953)

The Story of Little Red Riding Hood (1949)

The Story of the Tortoise and the Hare (2002)

Phil Tippett

Steven Spielberg

Dennis Muren

Steve Johnson

Joe Dante

Vincenzo Natali

John Lasseter

Ken Ralston

Robert Townson

Christopher Young

John Cairney

Greg Broadmore

Andrew Jones

Martine Beswick

Vanessa

Harryhausen

Colin Arthur

Caroline Munro

In Colour and Black and White [1.85:1]

Distributor

Arrow Films

The Sapphires

Australia 2012

Director: Wayne Blair

Certificate PG 103m 4s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"Just so as you know – you're all standing on blackfeller country," chirps Aboriginal singer Gail to her stunned all-white audience in a dusty Australian pub, before she and her sisters deliver a sweetly harmonised version of Merle Haggard's 'Today I Started Loving You Again'. It's one of a number of pointed reminders about racial politics that add a little welcome grit to the glitter in this scrappily energetic musical comedy about a 1960s sisters-and-cousin act who transform themselves into soul singers to tour Vietnam.

The Sapphires may look like the latest in that line of sequinned feelgood Australian comedies such as *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) and *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of The Desert* (1994), with its bawdy humour and slick musical numbers and cinematographer Warwick Thornton's sunny, sparkly visual style. Nonetheless, it's equally firmly rooted in Australia's recent cinema about the indigenous experience – albeit on its lighter side. These two strands balance well when Chris O'Dowd's down-on-his-luck Irish manager Dave preaches soul music as the girl's surefire route from poverty to singing success ("Can you sound... blacker?"). Yet the story is less adroit with the wider racial issues raised when the band travel to Vietnam to entertain the troops. Especially when asking us to believe that the girls placate an angry Vietcong patrol by addressing them in the Aboriginal Yorta Yorta dialect, to appeal to a sense of tribal kinship.

In its espousal of soul music as an escape route from social deprivation, as well as in its brassy tone, the film is a kissing cousin to Alan Parker's *The Commitments* (1991), right down to the enjoyably scratchy relationships between the



sisters. Their squabbling struggle with Dave to hone the gawky Cummeragunja Songbirds into the glossy Sapphires is where the narrative is funniest, and most surefooted. Though screenwriters Tony Briggs and Keith Thompson based the film on the real-life experiences of Briggs's mother and aunts, the Vietnam tour scenes feel more forced, shoehorned into the familiar arc of a central love story between Gail and Dave. Thankfully, O'Dowd's louche, likeable performance manages to pull the film's two halves together. Gifted with a script that plays to his deadpan strengths and comic timing ("Ninety per cent of all recorded music is shite, the other ten per cent is soul"), he lopes through the movie locked in exasperated argument with Deborah Mailman's fierce Gail. Grating nicely against his laconic tone, her intensity provides the film with some useful emotional heft. Her fellow Sapphires are left to act out *Dreamgirls*-style line-up conflicts and cheerful one-note characterisations, bar an awkward if well-intentioned subplot about cousin Kay's struggle to reclaim her Aboriginal identity after being raised white as part of the Stolen Generation.

Fortunately, these girls know how to pony like Bony Maronie, which goes some way to glossing over the predictable plotting. First-time filmmaker Wayne Blair keeps the tempo brisk with a succession of smartly staged soul classics. If only the film didn't prescribe music as the cure for all ills, on whatever scale. An a-capella version of 'Yellowbird' may cutely cure a family quarrel, but the grateful and bathetic looks on the faces of maimed Marines serenaded by the tearful quartet strike a bum note in what is otherwise a well-tuned tale. **S**

Little gems: Mailman, O'Dowd

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Rosemary Blight

Kyle du Fresne

Written by

Keith Thompson

Tony Briggs

Adapted from

the stage play by

Tony Briggs

Director of Photography

Warwick Thornton

Editor

Dany Cooper

Production Designer

Melinda Doring

Original Music

Composed, Arranged and Produced by

Cezary Skubiszewski

Sound Recordist

Ben Osmo

Costume Designer

Tess Schofield

Choreographer

Stephen Page

©The Sapphires Film Holdings Pty Ltd,

Screen Australia,

Goalpost Pictures

Australia Pty Ltd,

A.P. Facilities Pty Ltd

and Screen NSW

Production Companies

Screen Australia

and Goalpost Film

in association with

Screen NSW

present a Goalpost

Pictures production

Developed with

the assistance of

Film Victoria

Financed with

the assistance

of EFIC - Export

Finance & Insurance

Corporation

Produced in

association with

EFilm Australia

Financed in

association with

Screen NSW and its

regional Filming Fund

Principal Investor

(Development,

Enterprise Program

and Production)

Screen Australia

Executive Producers

Bob Weinstein

Harvey Weinstein

Tristan Whalley

Lee Soon Kie

John Sim

Cast

Chris O'Dowd

Dave Lovelace

Deborah Mailman

Gail

Jessica Mauboy

Julie

Shari Sebbens

Kay

Miranda Tapsell

Cynthia

Tori Kittles

Robby

Eka Darville

Hendo

Lynette Narkle

Nanny Theresa

Kylie Bell

Geraldine

Gregory J. Fryer

Selwyn

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

El Films

9,276 ft +0 frames

Australia, 1968. Gail, Cynthia and Julie, an indigenous trio of singing sisters, meet burned-out Irish musician Dave, who remodels them into a slick soul act, The Sapphires, and becomes their manager. They add their mixed-race cousin Kay to the line-up, and Julie is established as lead singer. Passing an audition to entertain troops in Vietnam, they are a hit in Saigon and on a tour of military bases. Gail and Dave fight frequently, but fall in love. Kay, who was forcibly removed as a child from her family to be raised as white, struggles with her identity. Carelessly, Dave accepts a big gig in the combat area, without a military escort. Only Kay's quick thinking prevents them from being captured by the Vietcong en route. At the big concert Dave admits to Gail that he is married, and gives her a letter. The camp comes under heavy fire. Dave insists on staying to find Kay and Julie, and is shot down as all the girls are helicoptered out. A devastated Gail reads his marriage proposal. Weeks later, she finds him in hospital, weak but alive. Back in Australia, Gail's family give approval for their marriage and Kay is accepted back into the tribe.

Sightseers

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Ben Wheatley
Certificate 15 88m 4s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Sentimentality, it's clear from the start, will be in short supply in *Sightseers*. Even before the credits have ended, a grotesque moaning, like a heifer with bellyache, invades the soundtrack. It emanates, we discover, from Carol (Eileen Davies), mother of the guilt-ridden Tina (Alice Lowe). She's mourning their dog Poppy who, we later learn (in the film's only flashback), fatally impaled itself on Tina's knitting needles. The dog, Carol laments, rocking back and forth, was "my only friend". "I'm your friend," says Tina, attempting to comfort her. Her mother shoots her a contemptuous look. "You're not a friend," she snaps. "You're a relative!"

Black humour featured on and off in both of Ben Wheatley's previous films, *Down Terrace* (2009) and *Kill List* (2011), but this time it's taken over the whole show. The killings are frequent, cartoonish and macabre, rather after the style of *The League of Gentlemen*; we're not expected to care either about the perpetrators, Tina and her bearded boyfriend Chris (Steve Oram), or the victims they come across during their caravan holiday through the north of England. The latter, in fact, are deliberately reduced to stereotypes – the yobbish litterbug, sticking up a middle finger when Chris remonstrates with him; the flushed, boozy bride-to-be at her hen night; or the snooty National Trust member who chides Tina for letting her dog foul an ancient site. "I never thought about murdering an innocent person like that before," comments Tina, after Chris has battered the poop-protestor to death. "He's not a person," retorts Chris, "he's a *Daily Mail* reader."

Given that Lowe and Oram, who also scripted (along with Amy Jump), are both stand-up comedians, it's not surprising that the film is rich in quotable lines, not all of them hogged by the leads (Carol, reacting to a distressed phone call from her daughter: "You didn't let him see you do number twos, did you, Tina?"). The pair also have a lot of fun playing up Chris and Tina's nerdishness: the gunks lined up on their car dashboard (one of which Tina steals from Chris's first victim); Chris's trainspotterly attachment to his caravan ("It's an Abbey Oxford," he proudly announces); their choice of tourist sites to visit, including the Crich Tramway Village and the Keswick Pencil Museum. At Keswick Tina buys a giant pencil for £24, and uses it to try to write Chris a note in the cafeteria. This couple, we gather, are the anorak version of *Bonnie and Clyde* or Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. Like them, Chris just wants "to be feared and respected – that's not too much to ask from life, is it?"

Other antecedents feed into the mix: *The Honeymoon Killers* (1969) for the clodhopping banality of evil; John Waters's *Serial Mom* (1994) for minor social peccadilloes as grounds for murder; Mike Leigh's *Nuts in May* (1976) for campsite class warfare; *Pretty Poison* (1968) for the psychopath outdone by his protégée. "I've done more murders in the three days with you than I did in the six months since I got made redundant!" Chris exclaims querulously. (The killings aren't dwelt on visually, but in terms of squelches and splats the sound department have done themselves proud.) And in the film's final shock-gag it's made abruptly clear who



Caravandalism: Alice Lowe, Steve Oram

comes out ahead in the ruthlessness stakes.

Not that any of these possible influences stick out. *Sightseers* has very much a flavour of its own: deadpan black comedy, relentlessly following its own dramatic logic while remaining sardonically amused at its own rampant implausibility. Several scenes are counterpointed by the ironic deployment of music, from Françoise Hardy's saccharine 'Amours toujours, tendresse, caresses' to Elgar's perennial warhorse 'Nimrod' from *The Enigma Variations* – and, more pointedly, Ed Cobb's 'Tainted Love'.

A less expected element is the sheer beauty of Wheatley's widescreen landscape photography,

shot by his regular DP Laurie Rose. When Chris, fired by envy, sets out to bludgeon pretentious travel writer Ian (Jonathan Aris) to death with a rock, the scene is prefaced by an almost haunted shot of the early morning Yorkshire Moors, a veil of mist floating low above the frost-tinged land. The austere loveliness of the setting makes the knockabout carnage it frames all the more incongruous – and, in some perverse way, all the funnier. Not only is *Sightseers* a relishable achievement for its devisers, Lowe and Oram, but it enhances Wheatley's reputation as currently the most refreshingly offbeat and unpredictable director of British crime movies. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nira Park
Claire Jones
Andy Starke

Written by

Alice Lowe
Steve Oram

Director of Photography

Laurie Rose

Edited by

Amy Jump
Ben Wheatley
Robin Hill

Production Designer

Jane Levick

Music Composed by

Jim Williams

Sound Design

Martin Pawley

Costume Designer

Rosa Dias

©Big Talk Pictures,

StudioCanal Limited,
The British Film
Institute, Channel
Four Television
Corporation

Production Companies

StudioCanal, Film4
and BFI present a
Big Talk Pictures
production in
association with
Rook Films
A film by Ben

Wheatley

Developed with the
support of Film4
Made with the
support of BFI's
Film Fund

Executive Producers

Matthew Justice
Jenny Borgars
Danny Perkins
Katherine Butler
Edgar Wright

Cast

Alice Lowe
Tina
Steve Oram

Chris

Eileen Davies

Carol

Roger Michael

tram conductor

Tony Way

Crich tourist

Seamus O'Neill

Mr Grant

Monica Dolan

Janice

Jonathan Aris

Ian

Aymen Hamoudchi

Chalid Suliman

Tom Meeten

head shaman

Kali Peacock

hiking shop assistant

Richard

Stephanie Jacob
Joan

Richard Glover

Martin

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

StudioCanal Limited

7,962 ft +0 frames

Birmingham, the present. Tina, a thirtysomething woman still suffering from guilt over the death of her dog Poppy, leaves for a caravan holiday with her new boyfriend Chris, despite objections from her neurotic mother Carol. Their first stop is the Crich Tramway Village in Derbyshire, where Chris is irritated by a litterbug. He runs him over with the caravan. Tina is turned on by the killing, and they stop in a lay-by to have vigorous sex. At the Dingle Dell campsite they meet Ian and Janice. Chris, supposedly writing a book, is jealous when Janice boasts that Ian is writing his third. The next morning Chris follows Ian, kills him with a rock and steals his camera and his dog, Banjo. Tina is delighted with Banjo, who reminds her of Poppy. At the Kimberley Stones she is berated by a National Trust member for not picking up Banjo's excrement. Chris beats the man to death with a stick. At a Lake District campsite they meet Martin, who has invented a one-man mini-caravan, which he calls a Carapod. Chris is fascinated by it, making Tina feel neglected. In a restaurant, they're seated near a hen-night party, and the bride-to-be kisses Chris. Tina follows her out to the car park and pushes her over a cliff. The next day, taking the wheel, she runs down a jogger. They stop for the night near the Ribblehead Viaduct. Martin arrives, and he and Chris discuss their business plans for the Carapod. Tina claims that Martin made a pass at her, but Chris is unconcerned. The next morning Tina pushes Martin and his pod over a cliff. The couple burn the caravan and ascend the viaduct for a suicide pact. At the last moment Tina lets go of Chris's hand and he falls to his death alone.

Skyfall

USA/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Sam Mendes
Certificate 12A 142m 58s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

Even as M, fighting to keep her job and protect the service, quotes Tennyson's *Ulysses* – "though we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven" – to a hostile parliamentary committee, Bond runs down Whitehall to rescue her from a vengeful assassin, her words – "weak by time and fate, but strong in will" – continuing over the chase. Bond, like Ulysses, is "a part of all that I have met"; *Skyfall*, without breaking the new cycle begun by *Casino Royale* (2006), is also a pivotal episode in the 60-year cross-media, multi-author odyssey begun by the novel of the same name. Much has Bond seen and known in that time, "cities of men and manners, climates, councils, governments", but almost none of his previous screen adventures have taken place in his native land. In Sam Mendes's first Bond movie, dazzlingly photographed by Roger Deakins, the sequences shot in wintry London and Scotland stand out.

Bond has returned gaunt and out of shape, assumed dead after a failed operation in Turkey, to no wife and no son, but to guard the woman who caused him to be shot. In Fleming's *Diamonds Are Forever*, Bond says that he is "almost married" to M, but neither Fleming nor his Bond could have countenanced a woman in charge. Daniel Craig's Bond, as Vesper Lynd guessed in *Casino Royale*, is an orphan, and in *Skyfall* Judi Dench's M is his adoptive mother. It is her dedication to the service that leads to Bond's near-death, and her antagonist, agent-turned-cyber-warrior Raoul Silva, acts on matricidal emotions that Bond himself represses. Yet whereas in her first appearance, in *GoldenEye* (1995), Dench's M called 007 a "relic", her climactic speech here is a defence of "human intelligence" in the age of Stuxnet.

Absent from the first Craig outings, Q, played here by Ben Whishaw in fine comic geek mode, is one of the doubters; like Silva, he can inflict damage enough via fibre-optic cable but supposes that "every now and then a trigger has to be pulled". He first meets Bond at the National Gallery, in front of Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire*, apparently just in order to draw a parallel between the scrapyard-bound warship and his obsolescent colleague. Bond sees only "a bloody big ship", conceivably a reference to Bond scholar Kingsley Amis's interpretation of *Jaws* – "about being bloody frightened of being eaten by a bloody great shark" – and a reminder that Bond is not only 'about' early-Victorian cultural references. It's also a cocktail of beautiful women, fancy cars, swank hotels, explosions, aircraft, chases, brands, shootouts, 'a series of exotic locations', gadgets, gambling, gags, the Bond theme, villains and their lairs, patriotic sentiment, and cocktails.

While these fundamentals have stayed constant over half a century, the franchise has long oscillated between the gargantuan – *You Only Live Twice* (1967), *Moonraker* (1979) – and the supposedly more sober – *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981). *Skyfall* follows the pattern in reaction to the excessively pared-down, low-stakes and joke-free *Quantum of Solace* (2008). Deakins's camerawork,



The fallen idol: Daniel Craig

free of the Bourrian cutting that beset *Quantum*, is the most striking instance of a general change. Craig's moodiness has been softened by the reintroduction of Q and Moneypenny, incarnated by Naomie Harris and given an origin story, while Javier Bardem as Silva is the most authentically Bondian Bond villain in decades: outrageously camp, inhabitant of a deserted island and, after an accident involving service-issue cyanide, afflicted by what Amis called the villain's sine qua non, "extreme physical grotesqueness".

Not everything works. Adele's retro theme, though a lyrical catastrophe, is still an improvement on the woeful Chris Cornell and Jack White-Alicia Keys tracks, but there hasn't been a great Bond score since *The*

Living Daylights (1987), John Barry's last.

Like its two predecessors, *Skyfall* ends with a new beginning. Dench's M has been replaced by Ralph Fiennes's old-school ex-agent, and HQ has been returned from the eyesore on Vauxhall Bridge to the old offices of Universal Exports. Craig's Bond has gone from new recruit to near-has-been in three films; but in this case one doesn't want consistency. The formerly chippy Bond winds up almost chipper, and ought to stay that way. Mendes has blown up Bond's family home as well as the service's, and less angst-ridden adventures seem to be in the offing. The Oscar-winning former artistic director of the Donmar Warehouse has proved himself well up to the task. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Michael G. Wilson
Barbara Broccoli

Written by

Neal Purvis
Robert Wade
John Logan
Director of Photography
Roger Deakins
Editors
Stuart Baird
Kate Baird

Production Designer

Dennis Gassner

Music

Thomas Newman
Production Sound Mixer
Stuart Wilson
Costume Designer
Jany Temime
Stunt Co-ordinator
Gary Powell

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Artists Corporation,
Columbia Pictures
Industries, Inc.

Production Companies
Albert R. Broccoli's
Eon Productions
presents
Made by Eon
Productions
and B23 Ltd
Executive Producer
Callum McDougall

Cast

Daniel Craig
James Bond
Javier Bardem
Gerardo Rodriguez,
'Raoul Silva'
Ralph Fiennes
Gareth Mallory
Naomie Harris
Eve
Bérénice Lim
Marlohe
Severine

Ben Whishaw

Q
Albert Finney
Kincade
Judi Dench
Mr
Ola Rapace
Patrice
Rory Kinnear
Bill Tanner

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

12,867 ft 0 frames

James Bond is accidentally shot by fellow agent Eve Moneypenny near Istanbul while trying to retrieve a stolen hard drive containing the identities of Nato agents. He is assumed to be dead, but returns to London when the Secret Intelligence Service HQ is bombed by the hard drive's new owner, a mysterious hacker with a vendetta against M. Coming under pressure to resign from Gareth Mallory, chairman of a Whitehall intelligence committee, M further blots her copybook through her loyalty to Bond, whom she readmits to the service even though he fails a physical examination. In pursuit of the hard drive, Bond follows a lead to Shanghai, then Macao, where he tangles with a criminal syndicate whose members include Séverine;

she leads Bond to Raoul Silva, her lover and boss. Silva, who inhabits a deserted island, explains to Bond that he is an ex-agent whom M abandoned to the Chinese at the time of the handover of Hong Kong. Bond easily captures Silva and brings him to London, but Silva sets in motion a plan to escape and kill M during a parliamentary select committee hearing.

Bond rescues M and takes her to his childhood home, Skyfall, in the Scottish Highlands. With his family's gamekeeper Kincade, Bond and M booby-trap the house and take on Silva's men when they arrive. M is mortally wounded and dies soon after Bond kills Silva with a knife. Back in London, Mallory takes M's place and Moneypenny decides that she is unsuited to fieldwork.

Some Guy Who Kills People

USA 2010, Director: Jack Perez,
Certificate 15 93m 35s

Reviewed by Thomas Dawson

On paper at least, the cast of *Some Guy Who Kills People* looks interesting: the lead Kevin Corrigan was a noted character actor in the US indie scene circa the mid-to-late 1990s; there's Karen Black from Altman's *Nashville* (1975); and Lucy Davis, who excelled as the receptionist Dawn in *The Office*. Alas this digitally shot comic slasher movie about a series of small-town murders – directed by Jack Perez, whose credits include 2009's *Mega Shark vs Giant Octopus* – is strictly straight-to-DVD/Blu-ray fare. It apparently wants to scare, amuse and tug at our heartstrings with its sentimental resolution.

Corrigan's ice-cream-parlour employee Ken, having spent an unspecified amount of time in a mental institution being treated for depression and suicidal tendencies, is positioned as an outsider artist who 'kills on the page' of his comic strips. His new girlfriend Stephanie (Davis) isn't put off by the scars on his wrist, nor by his nervousness, nor by the fact that he has recently been reunited with his 11-year-old daughter, who of course is emotionally empathetic way beyond her years.

There's a potentially interesting *Strangers on a Train*-style idea of one character acting out another's murderous impulses, though it feels here like a narrative gimmick. The lethargic pacing is another drawback – though at least Barry Bostwick's genial sheriff and Black's cantankerous mother provide a modicum of comic relief. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Ryan Levin
Michael Wormser
Micah Goldman

Written by

Ryan Levin

Director of Photography

Shawn Maurer

Editor

Chris Conlee

Production Designer

Zach Bangma

Composers

Ben Zarai

David Kitchens

Production Sound Mixer

David Alvarez

Costume Designer

Vania Ouzounova

©Some Guy, LLC

Production Companies

A Level 10 Films

production

A Battle of

Ireland Films A Litn-Up Films production

Executive Producer

John Landis

Cast

Kevin Corrigan

Ken Boyd

Barry Bostwick

Sheriff Walt Fuller

Karen Black

Ruth Boyd

Leo Fitzpatrick

Irv

Ariel Gade

Amy Wheeler

Eric Price

Ernie

Lucy Davis

Stephanie

Lou Beatty Jr

Al Fooger

Janie Haddad

Janet Wheeler

Ahmed Best

Mayor Maxwell

Christopher May

Wade Hutchins Nico Nicotera Lyle Bagwell

Dolby In Colour [1.78:1]

Distributor

Koch Media
Entertainment

8,422ft +8 frames

Green Oaks, US, the present. A number of local businessmen are found horribly murdered. The chief suspect is thirtysomething loner and comic-book artist Ken Boyd, who was tortured as a teenager by the basketball jocks at his high school. Ken is reunited with his estranged 11-year-old daughter Amy, and cautiously starts dating Stephanie, an English travel agent new to the area. Ken is questioned by Sheriff Fuller, who is dating Ken's mother, but he neither confirms nor denies his involvement. It emerges that Ken's diner colleague Irv, furious at the years of suffering his friend has endured, carried out the revenge murders.

Starbuck

Canada 2011
Director: Ken Scott
Certificate 15 109m 5s



From here to paternity: Patrick Huard

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

In *Starbuck*, an ultra-prolific sperm donor – his titular alias nicked from an unusually fertile real-life Canadian Holstein bull – belatedly discovers two decades on that he has become a father to hundreds. It's tempting to imagine a similar figure in relation to the abundance of North American man-child comedies in recent times: in the past year alone we've had Seth MacFarlane's *Ted*, the Duplass brothers' self-explanatory *Jeff Who Lives at Home* and Todd Solondz's *Dark Horse* – all portraits of arrested development with unworldly thirtysomething men at their centre. While Ken Scott's amiable, uneven Québécois variant doesn't do very much new with the naivety-to-maturity schtick, it has a higher concept than most. It's no surprise that Scott has already signed up to remake his film in Hollywood, with Vince Vaughn in the title role.

In his forties, David Wozniak (Patrick Huard) is a little older than the usual demographic. An indignant shambles who dresses like a teenager and incompetently runs deliveries for his family's meat-packing business, David is in deep water with loan sharks and has been informed by his long-suffering, newly pregnant girlfriend Valérie (Julie Le Breton) that he's not up to the job of fatherhood. After some lively opening scenes establishing David's haphazard lifestyle (including an ill-fated attempt at cannabis cultivation), Scott and Martin Petit's

script inevitably grows episodic once it's revealed that he has obliviously sired a small army: 142 of the 533 children plan to sue the sperm bank and obtain David's identity. Initially horrified, he begins surreptitiously inveigling himself into the lives of his offspring: cleaning up a drug addict, helping an actor make a crucial audition, volunteering to care for a disabled youth.

David's covert mission has superheroic elements, with the additional irony that even without a mask he can still remain anonymous. It also recalls the primary hook of TV's *My Name Is Earl*, in which Jason Lee's ne'er-do-well finds redemption by playing Good Samaritan to a list of those he once wronged. Not all these encounters convince, and there's a sentimental earnestness lurking at the fringes which threatens to dampen the gags that do work. Huard, though, is terrific as the bewildered but big-hearted slacker, and he gets amusing support from Antoine Bertrand as his equally hopeless best friend and lawyer, who supplies the film's biggest belly laugh when he narrowly avoids outing David on TV. Another plus is the evocative location work – shooting in Montreal's multi-ethnic Mile End quarter, Scott and DP Pierre Gill capture a characterful, earthy milieu in which to ground David's travails. There's no shortage of warmth, though this regularly invites mawkishness, leaving *Starbuck* – like its antihero – equal parts animated and gormless. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

André Rouleau

Producer

Danny Rossner

Screenplay

Ken Scott

Director of Photography

Pierre Gill

Editor

Yvann Thibaudeau

Production Designer

Danielle Labrie

Music

David Lafleche

Sound Recordist

Arnaud Derimay

Costume Designer

Sharon Scott

©PCF Starbuck

Le Film Inc.

Production Companies

Produced with the financial participation of Téléfilm Canada, SODEC, Radio

Canada, Super Écran, The Movie Network

Les Films Cristal presents a Caramel Films production

A film by Ken Scott

Produced with the financial participation of Quebec Film and Television Tax Credit,

Canada – Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit

Executive Producer

Ken Scott

Cast

Patrick Huard

David Wozniak

Julie Le Breton

Valérie

Antoine Bertrand

Avocat

Igor Ovadis

David's father

Dominic Phllie

severe brother

Marc Belanger

friendly brother/Paul

David Michaël

Antoine

Étienne

David Giguère

spokesman

Sarah-Jeanne

Labrosse

Julie

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Signature

Entertainment

9,817 ft +8 frames

Montreal, the present. Feckless 42-year-old David Wozniak works as a delivery driver for his family's meat-packing firm. Heavily in debt to loan sharks, David fails to raise money from a cannabis-growing scheme. His girlfriend Valérie reveals that she is pregnant, but regards David as unfit to be a father. David discovers that, as a result of his frequent donations to a sperm bank in his twenties (under the alias 'Starbuck'), he has fathered 533 children, 142 of whom are preparing a lawsuit to force the clinic to reveal David's identity. Meanwhile David involves himself anonymously in the lives of his offspring: he helps an actor win a part, gets a drug addict clean and visits a disabled youth. One son, Antoine, moves in with David but promises to keep his identity a secret. The loan sharks threaten David's family. The identity of 'Starbuck' becomes a media sensation. Valérie is touched when she learns that David used his donation fees to take his family on holiday. David is persuaded to file a successful countersuit for his right to anonymity, but later loses his damages when he decides to unmask himself. David's father gives him his stake of the business; the loan sharks are placated. Valérie gives birth and accepts David as the father. David's 142 other children visit the couple in hospital.

Trouble with the Curve

USA 2012
Director: Robert Lorenz
Certificate 12A 111m 3s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

Nearly any typical film starring Clint Eastwood would pale this year after his infamous improv stand-up routine, with empty chair and invisible Obama, in front of the Republican National Convention this August, a televisual uber-meme that instantly became 2012's most memorable American political moment. It's required viewing as so many Eastwood movies are not, and it was certainly a good deal more inventive and unpredictable than *Trouble with the Curve*. At the same time, Eastwood's wandering, almost surreal soliloquy inevitably taints the well from which he draws his fame and fandom; it became clear that his growling, nihilist-codger comedy routine isn't much of an act these days, but what he has in fact become – your most unpleasant old uncle or neighbour, repulsed by everything and everybody younger than he is.

This is the summation of Eastwood's character in this first film to be directed by his longtime second-unit lead Robert Lorenz, which in its outline comes off as the anti-*Moneyball* – a sanctification, in the world of baseball scouting and management, of old-school instinct and know-how over number-crunching and algorithms. Of course it's intolerable mush, fitfully limning the relationship between Eastwood's hickory-hard, cigar-chomping scouting vet and his spunky grown daughter (Amy Adams), whose power-lawyer lifestyle has a big hole in it where family should go.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Clint Eastwood
Robert Lorenz
Michele Weisler

Written by

Randy Brown

Director of Photography

Tom Stern

Edited by

Gary D. Roach

Production Designer by

James J. Murakami

Music

Marco Beltrami

Supervising Sound Editors

Alan Robert Murray

Costumes

Designed by

Bub Asman

Deborah Hopper

©Warner Bros.
Entertainment Inc.

Cast

Clint Eastwood

Gus

Amy Adams

Mickey

Justin Timberlake

Johnny

John Goodman

Pete Klein

Matthew Lillard

Phillip Sanderson

Robert Patrick

Vince

Joe Massingill

Bo Gentry

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros

Distributors (UK)

9,994 ft +8 frames

Present-day US. Gruff, ageing Atlanta Braves baseball scout Gus Lobel is going blind but refuses to admit it. Sensing Gus's frailty, his friend and co-worker Pete persuades Gus's adult daughter Mickey, an ambitious lawyer, to accompany her father on his yearly scouting trip through the Carolinas. Mickey wants to get close to her father but he can't open up. As the trip continues, Mickey is courted by rival scout Johnny. All the scouts are keen to sign the number-one prospect, a young homerun slammer – only Gus sees that he can't properly hit a curve ball. As the negotiations begin, Gus and Mickey discuss their difficult family history, much to his chagrin. A rival team signs the homerun hitter, but the baseball-schooled Mickey saves the day by spying a young Latino boy pitching by her motel and bringing him in to be signed.



Field of drones: Eastwood, Timberlake

Unfortunately for her she's stuck with trying to reconstruct a bond with this morose, self-absorbed ass, whom we are supposed to find amusing in his curmudgeonly sourness. Instead, we wonder why Adams's strawberry-blond firebrand didn't completely wipe her hands of him years ago, and tell contemporaries she's a happy orphan. She spends much of the film stomping away from him in snits, but she always returns, unintentionally encouraging us to watch for signs of co-dependent masochism that screenwriter Randy Brown never includes.

The clichés come otherwise flying at you in predictable arcs, like badminton birdies: of course, she's a lawyer who only really ever wanted to be a scout; of course, he talks to his long-dead wife's tombstone (leaving an opened beer on the grave, like flowers); of course, she runs the local bar's pool table, to the yokels' amazement; of course, when she's manhandled, Daddy rushes in to save her, fists flying. The antagonists (Matthew Lillard's lizardy franchise manager, Joe Massingill's monster-bully high-school prospect) are cartoons of leering evil, while John Goodman's front-office buddy is little more than a chubby saint. As inevitably as the sunrise, the old fart and his eager daughter bicker and argue about feelings, and then resolve it all, in the unlikeliest of heroic climaxes, over baseball. In the meantime, more dysfunction is revealed in the form of a parent-child history of abandonment and neglect that makes the film's agenda of heart-warmth and healing all but impossible to swallow on your most credulous day.

Hollywood always wants to 'raise the stakes', but also to settle for easy answers and unreserved treacle, and the two impulses often clash. The attempt to offset the angst with tepid romantic comedy – Justin Timberlake's rival scout trailing after Adams and oozing charm – strikes a rough balance between flirty wit and clubfooted jokes, but once you're stuck in the Carolinas with this group, the young couple's sparring is club-soda refreshing. Adams herself is, as always, a guileless blast of intelligent grace, though at this point it seems as though she might have as tough a time finding roles that suit her sparkle as Paula Prentiss or Téa Leoni did before her. This double-dealing schmaltz barely meets her halfway. S

Up There

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Zam Salim
Certificate 15 79m 44s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

If such a thing as the afterlife existed, imagine how uncanny it would be if it looked exactly the same as the world of the living. Or even worse, if it bore more than a passing resemblance to a multipurpose job centre. Give or take a couple of minor adjustments, that's exactly what recently deceased thirtysomething City worker Martin, the protagonist of Zam Salim's debut film *Up There*, discovers. Martin is soon paired with twentysomething Rash to act as carers, which involves assisting the newly dead through a highly bureaucratic limbo where, by means of group therapy and counselling, they will hopefully be prepared to go 'Up There'. But Rash, a 'ghetto' motormouth with the obligatory good heart, manages to scare off their first assignment – a mistake that will take the duo to the coastal town of Newport in Scotland in order to bring back the deceased in time for Martin's assessment meeting with his supervisors.

It's a genuinely entertaining premise developed with some panache, even if its early promise isn't quite fulfilled. The most striking element of *Up There* is its cinematography, which manages to conjure a decidedly offbeat afterworld by virtue of a perpetually muted palette that drenches everything in bluish hues, especially city streets, hospitals and official buildings, evoking an atmosphere of permanent damp and decay.

A great deal of the success of Salim's film rests on Burn Gorman's shoulders in the role of Martin, his surprised-yet-blank expression perfect for his new situation. Martin will of course have to learn to be truly selfless on this particular journey of self-improvement, during which we too discover the myriad deadpan, low-key touches that populate the film. The dead, for example, are unable to open doors or



Happy ever afterlife: Kate O'Flynn

Yossi

Israel 2012
Director: Eytan Fox

move objects, so long conversations take place through closed doors until they're opened by a living person; and there's a good deal of reading over library-users' shoulders, which recalls Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (1987), albeit with none of the latter's poetic density.

Yet if *Up There* is subtle, funny and gentle in tone, it also manages to touch on more poignant matters beneath that light-hearted facade. As in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* (1988), limbo is administered with mountains of paperwork in a gloomy building (which we the living cannot see) at the edge of the city, suggesting the impersonality, the sense of dread and entrapment of any big metropolis. But perhaps the nicest touch is turning the greyish seaside resort that Martin and Rash's search takes them to into the unlikely background for a sort of slowed-down thriller which comments in barbed fashion on small-town mentality, racial issues (there's an impending sense of threat around Rash in this all-white community), love, drinking, suicide and, of course, dying young. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Annalise Davis

Written by

Zam Salim

Director of Photography

Ole Birkeland

Editor

Richard Graham

Production Designer

Nike McLoughlin

Music

Christian Henson

Supervising Sound Editors/Re-recording Mixers

Steve Parker

Richard Lewis

Costume Designer

Anna Robbins

©Wilder Films (Laid Off) Limited, UK Film Council and Creative Scotland
Production

Companies

UK Film Council, Creative Scotland and BBC Films present in association with Eyeline Entertainment a Wilder Films production

Executive Producer
Andy Paterson

Cast

Burn Gorman

Martin

Kate O'Flynn

Liz

Aymen Hamdouchi

Rash

Kulvinder Ghir

Ali

Farren Morgan

Chick

Jo Hartley

Margaret

Alexander Morton

new supervisor

Chris Watt

counsellor

Warren Brown

Slab Boy Joey

Iain De Caestecker

Tommy

Dolby

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Wilder Films

7,176ft +0 frames

The afterlife. Thirtysomething Martin, formerly a City worker in London, was killed by a runaway car. Since arriving in limbo, he's worked as a carer for the newly dead. This involves welcoming them into the afterlife and helping them cope with their new situation by attending workshops and caring for other dead people, until they are ready to go 'Up There'. When his original partner Ali makes it up, Martin is allocated a new colleague, Rash, a chatty twentysomething who manages to scare off their first deceased person, a young man named Tommy. Martin and Rash go in search of him in Newport on the Scottish coast. There they meet Liz, who was killed along with her boyfriend in a car accident. Together they find Tommy in time for Martin's assessment with his supervisor. Just as Martin is about to go Up There, Tommy tells him that Rash's brother, who was in a coma (and whom Rash was looking forward to meeting in the afterlife), has pulled through. Martin turns back and searches for Rash, who has become a 'starer' – the term used to define those who can't cope with their new situation and are left staring into space. Martin manages to snap him out of this state, and the three of them head off in search of new adventures, with Martin choosing not to go Up There just yet.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Ayelet Kait

Amir Harel

Moshe Edry

Leon Edry

Eytan Fox

Written by

Itay Segal

Director of Photography

Guy Raz

Editor

Yosef Grunfeld

Art Director

Mor Barak

Music

Keren Ann

Sound Design

Ronen Nagel

Costume

Mira Karmely

Chen Carmi

©[no company given]

Production Companies

United King Films & Lama Films present an Eytan Fox film

Israeli Film Fund,

Reshet, Yes.,

Dan, Atraf

Cast

Ohad Knoller

Yossi

Oz Zehavi

Tom

Orly Silbersatz

Varda

Ola Schur Selektar

Nina

Lior Ashkenazi

Moti

Meir Golani

Nimrod

Gil Desiano

Yariv

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures

Israeli theatrical title
Ha-sippur shel Yossi



The quiet man: Ohad Knoller

characters, Tom is too good to be true: not only beautiful but perceptive, tender and – unlike Yariv – accepting of the contrast between his buff physique and Yossi's more bearish figure. None of which is impossible, of course, but the contrast between the two halves of the film – the first predominantly grey and empty, the second a lushly shot resort filled with youthful bodies – verges on *Shirley Valentine* territory, but without the sense of humour or social awareness.

In the final scene, Tom even suggests leaving the army to live a fantasy life on the beach with Yossi. The implications of both desertion and the location of that fantasy life – on the edge of Sinai and near a border checkpoint – are unexplored, as is the insistent eroticisation and romanticisation of the IDF, despite Tom's jokey portrayal of Yossi's generation's hots for Ben Gurion. *Yossi & Jagger's* tight, almost claustrophobic location in the military world gave it a focus and tension that the sequel lacks; likewise, its central love story possessed a narrative energy which, by contrast, leaves *Yossi* feeling both slight and ponderous. S

Tel Aviv, the present. Dr Yossi Gutman divides his time between long shifts at the hospital and a bachelor existence of online porn and take-out food. Startled when one of his patients, Varda Amichai, turns out to be the mother of his former boyfriend Lior, who died a decade ago when they were on military service together, Yossi makes a mistake in another patient's surgery. His attempts to resolve his grief go wrong: an online hook-up turns into a confrontation about his body image; his newly divorced colleague Moti tries to fix him up with a girl in a bar; and he hurts the night nurse, Nina, who has a crush on him. Finally, he visits Varda and tells her what Lior hadn't about their relationship. Varda is unsupportive but her husband Shmulik lets Yossi visit Lior's bedroom. Distressed, Yossi drives towards Sinai despite danger warnings, giving a ride to four young soldiers heading for R&R in a resort near Eilat. Intrigued by one of their number, Tom (who shares his love of Mahler), Yossi stays at the resort but is unable to relax, refusing Tom's offer of a massage. Tom, however, persists in seeking Yossi out, finally breaking through his grief and shyness after stepping on a sea urchin.

You Are God

Poland 2012
Director: Leszek Dawid
Certificate 15 123m 52s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

A massive domestic hit, Leszek Dawid's second feature is a portrait of the short-lived but highly influential hip-hop band Paktofonika, which recorded one album (*Kinematografia*) just before its leader Piotr Luszcz (aka 'Magik') committed suicide on Boxing Day 2000. For a British viewer, it's hard not to be reminded of Anton Corbijn's *Control* (2007), not least because both Paktofonika and Joy Division turned the industrial landscapes and urban squalor of (respectively) Katowice and Manchester into similarly dark, brooding soundscapes. However, *You Are God* has enough distinctions and pleasures of its own.

Although clearly intended for domestic consumption, the film is surprisingly engrossing even when approached with no prior knowledge of the late-1990s Polish hip-hop scene. It doesn't spoon-feed its audience by any means, but it's made clear by implication that the decade's sharp drop in living standards following the collapse of communism provided just as fertile ground for inspiration as American and British inner cities did for Paktofonika's English-rapping counterparts – as someone puts it: "Holy shit, you can do that in Polish!" Inevitably, the English subtitles only offer a cursory taster of the rhymes, rhythms and intricate wordplay devised by Magik and his colleagues Fokus and Rahim, but one certainly gets the general idea – and their friend Sot's virtuoso impersonation of a human beatbox doesn't need translation. Magik's driven perfectionism even under duress is well caught too – during an illicit overnight recording session in a school workshop, he insists that Fokus perform take after take of the single word *niestety* ('unfortunately').

The film also depicts the semi-amateur nature of entrepreneurship in post-communist Poland. Paktofonika has two producer-managers, one thuggish and conniving (the real-life Krzysztof Koza has apparently expressed strong objections to his portrayal), his successor Gustaw Zarzycki (sad-eyed Arkadiusz Jakubik) much more sympathetic, but clearly improvising on the hoof. Zarzycki's relationship with Magik provides the final act's emotional crux: he genuinely wants to be supportive, but isn't above making stupid suggestions on crassly commercial grounds, such as turning the 19th-century poetry of Cyprian Norwid into rap.

All three leads deservedly won awards at the Gdynia Film Festival, though Marcin Kowalczyk's Magik garnered most of the praise, even from the co-founder of Magik's old band Kaliber 44 after he criticised the strict factual accuracy of the early scenes (as with all such biopics, there are numerous simplifications and elisions). Despite Kowalczyk's almost total inexperience (his CV is even shorter than Sam Riley's pre-*Control* one), he effortlessly dominates the film, both as the distant, charismatic role model Magik of the first half and the all-too-human Piotrek of the second. Two motifs underscore his increasing emotional frailty: his beloved headphones are repeatedly damaged (first by colleagues' carelessness, then by ardent fans), and he expresses his horror of being eavesdropped on more than once – ironically, given that he was



Hip-hop farm: Dawid Ogródniak, Marcin Kowalczyk, Tomasz Schuchardt

only too happy to bare his soul in his work.

The title turns one of Magik's most notorious songs ('I Am God') into the second person, as if addressed to its now-deceased author. The film shows Fokus and Rahim expressing their disquiet about the title, as if anticipating a row along the lines of John Lennon's "bigger than Jesus" quip, something not at all implausible in a still strongly Catholic country. We're not shown the outcome, but in the event the CD came out after Magik's death, and the song's inclusion clearly didn't prevent it winning a Fryderyk (a Polish Grammy) for best hip-hop album.

Dawid first made his reputation with the documentary mini-feature *A Bar at Victoria Station* (2003), about two young Poles negotiating the official and illicit obstacle course of seeking work in London before

Poland's EU accession, and his fiction debut *Ki* (2011), about a single mother trying to maintain both a life and a sense of identity. *You Are God* is similar to both: although based on an actual person, Magik is in the same boat as Kinga ('Ki'), trying to spread his imaginative wings while having to cope with early parenthood and the need to earn a viable income – a posthumous settling of Paktofonika's accounts reveals to his shocked former colleagues how much cash he needed to draw to keep things going. Stylistically, Dawid and cinematographer Radosław Ladcuk favour handheld camerawork and a limited palette of mainly greens, blues and greys, with the superb soundtrack taking on most of the heavy lifting when it comes to getting inside the characters' heads. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Jerzy Kapuscinski
Łukasz Barczyk
Screenplay
Maciej Pisuk
Director of Photography
Radosław Ladcuk
Editor
Jarosław Kaminski
Production

Designers
Katarzyna Sobanska
Marcel Ślawniński
Music
Paktofonika
Wojciech Alszer
Sebastian Salbert
Sound
Leszek Freund
Costume Designer
Agata Culak

©TBC
Production Company
Kadr Film Studio
Executive Producer
Wojciech Kabarowski
Cast
Marcin Kowalczyk
Piotr Luszcz, 'Magik'

Dawid Ogródniak
Sebastian Salbert,
'Rahim'
Tomasz Schuchardt
Wojciech Alszer,
'Fokus'
Arkadiusz Jakubik
Marcin Dorociński
Przemysław Bluszcza
Halina Bednarz
Magdalena Kacprzak
Elżbieta Karkoszka
Miroslaw Neiner/
Plotr Nowak
Katarzyna Wajda
Małgorzata Zajączkowska
In Colour Subtitles
Distributor

Project London
Films Ltd
11148 ft +0 frames
Polish theatrical title
Jestes Bogiem

Katowice, Poland, 1998. Wojciech Alszer (aka 'Fokus') meets more established fellow rapper Piotr Luszcz (aka 'Magik') at school and they swap cassettes of their work. Sebastian Salbert (aka 'Rahim') travels from Mikołów to visit Magik and impresses him with his zeal if not his delivery. Magik leaves hip-hop outfit Kaliber 44 and forms Paktofonika with Fokus and Rahim. Magik arranges a short-notice concert, which goes badly until he rescues it with a virtuosic solo performance. Krzysztof Koza offers to fund the recording of four songs. The recording is interrupted by an argument between Magik and his pregnant girlfriend Justyna, and they fail to finish the session. Fokus copies the keys to his school's metal workshop and Paktofonika records there overnight. Magik and Justyna marry.

Gustaw Zarzycki offers to manage Paktofonika and pay advances to a cash-strapped Magik. Justyna gives birth to a son, Filip, but throws Magik out after she catches him dallying with a TV interviewer. Attempting to patch things up, he invites her to a concert, but she spots him (innocently) hugging a female fan on CCTV. Zarzycki worries about Magik's mental state, as do Fokus and Rahim when they hear his new song 'I Am God'. In mid-December 2000, Zarzycki delivers CDs of Paktofonika's debut album *Kinematografia*. The morning after a Christmas Day reunion with Justyna and Filip, Magik jumps from a balcony to his death. In 2001, *Kinematografia* wins a Fryderyk award. On 21 March 2003, Fokus and Rahim perform as Paktofonika for the last time.



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Home cinema



Feeling Blu, perhaps: Alfred Hitchcock, subject of Universal's new 'Masterpiece' Blu-ray collection

THERE'S A HITCH

He topped the *Sight & Sound* poll earlier this year, and now Alfred Hitchcock is celebrated with a 14-film Blu-ray release. Shame about the shortcomings

ALFRED HITCHCOCK: THE MASTERPIECE COLLECTION

Saboteur/Shadow of a Doubt/Rope/Rear Window/The Trouble with Harry/The Man Who Knew Too Much/Vertigo/Psycho/The Birds/Marnie/Torn Curtain/Topaz/Frenzy/Family Plot

USA/UK 1942-76; Universal/Region 0 Blu-ray; Certificate 18; Aspect Ratios 1.37:1 ('Saboteur', 'Shadow of a Doubt', 'Rope'), 1.66:1 ('Rear Window') and 1.85:1 (all others); Features: new 'The Birds' documentary and supplementary material ported from the 2005 DVD box-set of the same films

Reviewed by Nick Wrigley

Such overflowing love for Alfred Hitchcock this year! In addition to the BFI's enormous Cultural Olympiad celebrations there has been a seemingly constant flurry of HD-remastered, close-to-definitive Hitchcock Blu-ray editions: *The 39 Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes* from

Criterion; *Rebecca*, *Notorious* and *Spellbound* from MGM; *To Catch a Thief* from Paramount (also one of the most eye-popping Blu-rays ever spun); Masters of Cinema's *Lifeboat* plus two wartime shorts (disclosure: I produced this one); and just recently, Network's *The Lodger* and Warner Bros with *Strangers on a Train* and *Dial M for Murder*. (*A North by Northwest* Blu-ray also arrived from Warners in 2009 and *Psycho* from Universal in 2010).

So when Hitch was crowned king in the latest decennial *Sight & Sound* poll, the scene was set for this highly anticipated Universal Blu-ray box of 14 of his features (the set's mere existence doubles the number of Hitchcock films available on the format). For Universal, it is the showpiece of their 2012 centenary celebrations and a valuable opportunity to address some longstanding technical issues with the old UK DVD editions – such as *Vertigo*'s remixed 5.1 soundtrack, a less than authentic effort with re-recorded Foley (the part of the soundtrack containing only sound effects recorded in post-production) due to a dearth of separate sound elements in the vaults. Despite the existence of an original mono mix with original Foley in

the vaults, this 5.1 remix became the default and only soundtrack for the film, even for those without 5.1 equipment who had to put up with a stereo mixdown of the 5.1 remix (if you only have stereo speakers, it's important that all six channels of the 5.1 surround track are heard, mixed down to two). The UK set lazily included a few pre-existing subpar DVDs – *Marnie* has always been a 'pan-and-scan' travesty, and frustrating issues plagued *The Birds*, *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain*. So there was quite a list of things that this new Blu-ray set needed to put right.

Luckily, the technical requirements of Blu-ray necessitate new HD 'image harvests' (fresh scans of the best surviving film elements, done once, and then propagated around the world) and these new HD masters maintain a correct 24fps on Blu-ray in all territories (rather than PAL DVD's eternal 25fps problem of 4 per cent speeded-up/shorter running time and the resulting out-of-pitch audio that brings). Requiring considerable outlay – retailing at around the £100 mark – and aimed squarely at discerning home-video enthusiasts with Blu-ray equipment, the set has been made available in either standard packaging or a

dour limited-edition creation which resembles a plastic mausoleum and houses assorted postcards, a book and more (only photographs of which were available at the time of writing). The films contained within mirror an earlier 2005 DVD box-set which was also titled 'The Masterpiece Collection' in the US, but simply 'Alfred Hitchcock' in the UK (a more accurate and useful title for all these sets might have been 'Hitchcock at Universal 1942-76', which would perhaps have avoided the customer confusion currently littering online retailer product pages and forums ("Where's *Rebecca*?", "How can this be a 'Masterpiece' collection without *Notorious*?" etc).

The set includes a whopping 13 Blu-ray debuts in 1080p (over 27 hours, excluding extras), with only *Psycho* previously issued on Blu-ray (an impressive 50th-anniversary disc from 2010 correcting many niggles from past DVD editions) – I wasn't sent a new *Psycho* to review, so I'm presuming that disc is unchanged from the last release.

On receiving the review discs in early September, I was surprised to find that I seemed to be the only reviewer in the world with finished checkdisks and an internet connection. Right away I spotted that the opening credit sequence for *Frenzy* had been completely re-rendered in HD, with retyped credits introducing new typographical and spelling errors, among them the sloppy misspelling of crew members' names. I made an infographic of the errors, posted it online that night, and set about looking for more surprises. They came thick and fast. Deep breath: colour schemes in *Vertigo* were suspect (was Scottie's brown suit really supposed to be so luminously aubergine?). Where was the original *Vertigo* mono track? (Only a 5.1 track was included, and this later turned out not to be the much derided 5.1 mix but a newly remixed 5.1 track with some of the earlier mix's most heinous crimes subdued.) Why do Farcot Edouart's process shots in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* look so jarring, and why does the film end with a 1980s Universal/MCA motion ident (presumably from the 1983 theatrical reissue) rather than the original 1956 Paramount ident? Why is *Frenzy* the only film in the box-set to be slathered with so much HD DVNR (Digital Video Noise Reduction) that portions of the frame are grainless and completely frozen on static shots? Why do *Marnie* and *Torn Curtain* look like DVDs that have been uprezzed through a 1080p fuzzbox ('uprezzing' is the scaling of an image to a higher resolution)? What on earth is going on with the encoding of *Family Plot*, which occasionally looks like pixellated mush? And why does *The Birds* now look so digital and unfilmic?

By now I'd heard that my various findings were being pored over by Universal USA and had gone viral on mainstream sites – Slate, IGN etc – with MSN Movies reporting "scathing reviews from England". Forums were lighting up as forums do. Then, only three weeks before the set was due to hit the shelves, Universal delayed its release worldwide by five weeks and issued a statement: "Certain imperfections with the product have come to light and, as a result, we are adjusting the release date to correct these points." I have no idea whether they were referring to my findings or whether, very late in the day, they had found something themselves



Innocents abroad: James Stewart with Brenda de Banzie in the 1956 'The Man Who Knew Too Much'

– but there has been no further information about which discs might be corrected.

At this point, writing an accurate review becomes impossible. Should we buy the box-set on its release and print a review weeks after the release date? Or print a sort of experiential meta-review to chronicle what actually happened? (Other print magazines had already 'reviewed' the set by early October, authoritatively regurgitating the Universal press release as hard info, with no mention of any problems whatsoever.)

So to begin with, the good news – and there is quite a lot. For the very first time, every single film is now in its original aspect ratio (it shouldn't be much to ask, but it's a first for *Marnie* on home video in the UK), despite the misleading Universal promo video for this box-set on YouTube which stretches the three 1.37:1 films (*Saboteur*, *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Rope*) to fill 16:9 and is arguably more damaging than not having a promo video at all (ironically, it ends with the Universal logo swirling down *Psycho*'s bath plughole). *Rear Window*, *The Trouble with Harry* and *Vertigo* were the three titles that visually impressed me the most (almost certainly due to their VistaVision origins) – hopefully the last-minute colour fixes to *Vertigo* are being applied accurately. Indeed, the first five films in the set – *Saboteur*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Rope*, *Rear Window* and *The Trouble with Harry* – are all extremely impressive on Blu-ray and could thrill the socks off anyone. The first two black-and-white titles look as good as anything in Universal's excellent 'Monsters' Blu-ray box-set, for example (reviewed on page 113). *Topaz* is also a perfectly acceptable presentation, but this was the only review disc that appeared to be for the American market, and had slightly different menus. All the other titles (minus *Psycho*, of course) have something

By now I'd heard that my findings had gone viral on mainstream sites. Forums were lighting up as forums do

about them that detracts from the overall experience. Whether it's the questionable transfers of *Marnie*, *Torn Curtain*, *Frenzy* and *Family Plot*; the uniquely overcooked look of *The Birds*; the colour scheme of *Vertigo* (which otherwise is an extraordinarily detailed and sumptuous image); the jarring quality of process shots in some of the films – it's a real mixed bunch. It also opens up a debate about how VistaVision should be rendered in 1080p, because we're now seeing materials scanned at a higher resolution than was originally intended to be seen in the cinema (which would have been optically reduced via matrices to 35mm prints, hiding a multitude of sins and giving different types of shot a similar cohesive look).

According to *Rear Window*'s restorer Robert Harris, the film was shot and originally printed on various Eastman stocks, yet for the 1961-62 reissue, prints were produced via dye-transfer method, which tended to an overall beige look. Hence those who saw the film at the cinema in 1954 saw a different-looking film to those who saw it in 1961, just as what we're seeing now looks different due to changing technology. When original prints have long faded and higher generation elements are being scanned, how do we decide what constitutes the grain density and colour grading of a new HD master?

There is a definite sense that Universal bit off more than it could chew with this huge set. The lack of new extras (apart from on *The Birds*), the lack of effort in even trying to recreate or improve static galleries of production stills, sketches and designs in glorious 1080p rather than old, ported 4:3 standard definition (this is a Blu-ray set after all) raises questions about marketing decisions dictating production ambition and Universal's cutting of corners generally. I can't help wondering whether it was wise to throw so many titles together in such a large set. Each title could have luxuriated in the sort of attention the Criterion Collection brings to everything it does, and this review might have been a lavender love sigh (rather than a wet parp). I hope the necessary corrections are being made prior to release. Hitch deserved better than this.

New releases

FILMS BY BORIS BARNET

Outskirts

USSR 1933; Mr Bongo Films/Region O DVD; Certificate PG; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

By the Bluest of Seas

USSR 1936; Mr Bongo Films/Region O DVD; Certificate U; 67 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

To anyone under the not unreasonable impression that Soviet films of the 1920s and 30s were intensely serious, pile-drivingly polemical affairs, Boris Barnet's features come across more like early Russian-language collaborations by Jirí Menzel and Bohumil Hrabal: *Outskirts* would double-bill perfectly with *Closely Observed Trains*.

Mere minutes into his first sound feature *The Outskirts*, the initially jaunty soundtrack goes memorably haywire (did the carthorse really speak just then?), and even vicious repression by the Tsarist Oprichniki is presented like a Fellini-esque carnival, with a panicked dog somersaulting out of the way and a young rogue using the crackdown as an excuse to cop a feel of his intended, punctuated by a screen-filling wink. The film is set in a small village in 1914, so we can guess the fate of the German inhabitants and the motley Russian idlers when they volunteer to fight for the Motherland, though even during the memorably realistic trench scenes Barnet can't resist demonstrating that laughter is a tonic. As the Hungarian critic Béla Balázs sagely observed, Barnet doesn't draw caricatures of serious things, but shows them seriously without stripping out the comic details. Balázs compared him with Shakespeare, but Chekhov is more likely to have been a conscious influence: unlike the archetypal 'models' favoured by many of his contemporaries, Barnet's characters live and breathe, bicker and laugh, and unwittingly expose their undergarments when expecting to be taken seriously.

Its title and U certificate suggest that Barnet's 1936 film *By the Bluest of Seas* will be lighter fare: even though it notionally starts with a shipwreck, it's presented as a rhapsodic paean to the sea and its natural inhabitants, with one of the rescued sailors complaining that he's ticklish as he and his companion are hauled aboard to safety and transportation to an island paradise whose inhabitants spontaneously burst into song. Though there are hefty dollops of propaganda (the island is run by the 'Lights of Communism' fishing cooperative, and the object of the sailors' love is its fetchingly blonde but decidedly no-nonsense chairwoman Mashenka), Barnet seems more interested in channelling Murnau and Vigo, whose last features *Tabu* (1931) and *L'Atalante* (1934) have a similarly woozy, dream-soaked feel. **Discs:** Clearly sourced from analogue video masters and unrestored prints, these no-frills discs are nonetheless perfectly watchable. However, they can't come close to competing with Ruscico's extensively annotated Hyperkino editions except on price.

Golden couple: 'Casque d'or'

CASQUE D'OR

Jacques Becker; France 1952; StudioCanal/Region 2 Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Feature: 'At the Heart of Emotions – The Legend of Golden Marie'

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Hard to credit that *Casque d'or*, now widely considered Jacques Becker's masterpiece, was largely dismissed on its initial release in France as something of a letdown after his previous films. What disappointed the French critics, it seems, was that Becker – hitherto seen as the chronicler of contemporary French society – had made a period drama. Yet he was determined that *Casque d'or* shouldn't be, in any conventional sense, a period film. "I wanted my actors to behave as though they were living at the period of the film," he explained, "not as if they were wearing costumes." His recreation of turn-of-the-century Paris is lovingly detailed and exact, and within it his cast move, speak and hold themselves as in their native habitat.

Becker was a consummate director of actors, considerate and responsive, and he drew from Simone Signoret and Serge Reggiani, as the doomed lovers Marie and Manda, the performances of their careers. Most of the action takes place in the streets and smoky *estaminets* of Paris, in narrow alleys and courtyards shadowed by violence and death. But midway through the film Becker grants his lovers a brief rural idyll in a cottage by the banks of the Marne. As they wake from their first night together in a plump double bed, Marie smiles lazily at her lover. A few moments later, he fetches her a bowl of coffee and hands it to her through the open window where she stands with her golden hair tumbled loose over her nightdress. Fresh coffee in the morning; the smell of lovemaking on rumpled sheets; rarely in cinema has the sweet transience of erotic passion been more vividly evoked.

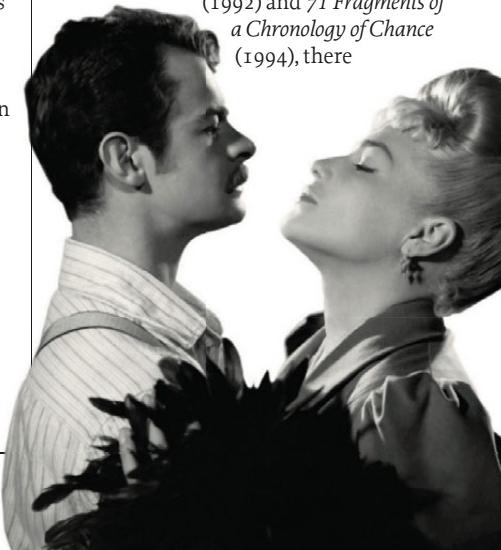
Disc: A crisp Blu-ray transfer, but not notably superior to Criterion's Region O DVD. And the sole extra makes for a far less generous package.

THE CASTLE

Michael Haneke; Germany/Austria 1997; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 123 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: '24 Realities per Second' documentary by Nina Kusturica and Eva Testor

Reviewed by Kate Stables

After the 'emotional glaciation' trilogy of *The Seventh Continent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), there



came the literal glaciation of Michael Haneke's snow-bound TV adaptation of Kafka's novel *The Castle*, neatly matching up their shared taste for exploring alienation.

Shot in the director's habitual spare, cerebral style but corralling the action within a claustrophobic, blizzard-blitzed hamlet, the film is respectful to a fault to its source, but as controlled and intimate as Welles's *The Trial* (1962) is surreal and sprawling. It weaves Kafka's prose through as narration, creating knotty explanations, interior monologues and even repetitions of onscreen dialogue, in a creditable attempt to achieve the dense overlapping quality of the novel. This faithfulness extends to the film's ending, which stops abruptly where Kafka's fragment of manuscript does, though it achieves its own curious, unnerving kind of closure.

Ulrich Mühe is quietly mesmerising as 'K', the visiting land-surveyor banjaxed by bewildering bureaucracy and village hostility, presenting him as a man alternately mustering impotent rage, inadequate guile and wide-eyed silent stoicism in order to deal with the random cruelties and implacable obstructions of his lot. A fitful, neurotic romance with barmaid Frieda (a jumpy Susanne Lothar) gives the film poignancy and much needed narrative momentum, while K's baffling village encounters assume the circular rhythms and absurdities of a bad dream.

As in *Funny Games* (whose torturer Frank Giering turns up here as one half of a pair of gormlessly dogged assistants), there's an almost incongruous humour tucked in among the pain and paranoia which belies Haneke's sombre reputation.

Disc: An excellent transfer, showing off the film's purposely dingy visuals and subtle sound design. Nina Kusturica and Eva Testor's 2005 documentary *24 Realities per Second* shadows Haneke dutifully to hoover up his insights ("I always say that film is 24 lies per second at the service of truth") but doesn't provide any of its own.

CÉSAR ET ROSALIE

Claude Sautet; France 1972; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 111/106 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: documentary

Reviewed by Geoff Andrew

Sadly, the late Claude Sautet's work is not as well known outside France as it once was and still should be. Notwithstanding a string of successes in the 1970s and a fine return to box-office form after the disappointing 1980s

with *Un cœur en hiver* (1992) and *Nelly et Monsieur Arnaud* (1995), he's now seldom mentioned by film historians and critics, and when he is, it's primarily (and often a little dismissively) as someone who limited himself to depicting the lives of the French bourgeoisie. If that's largely an accurate assessment, it's also an inadequate one, in so far as it fails to convey the psychological acuity, the tonal subtlety and the discreet formal sophistication of his best films.

This polished account of a romantic triangle offers a possible clue to such



HORRIBLE HISTORY

In the 1930s, Universal Pictures essentially invented the horror film with stories of fiends and monsters that continue to shape the genre today

UNIVERSAL MONSTERS THE ESSENTIAL COLLECTION

*Dracula/Drácula (Spanish version)/Frankenstein/
The Mummy/The Invisible Man/The Bride of
Frankenstein/The Wolf Man/Phantom of the
Opera/Creature from the Black Lagoon*

Various directors; US 1931-54; Universal Pictures/
Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 644 minutes; Features:
commentaries, documentaries, galleries, trailers etc

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the early 1930s, under the aegis of studio head Carl Laemmle Jr, Universal Pictures essentially invented the horror movie. A run of films synthesised precedents such as German expressionism, the Broadway mystery-comedies of the 1920s, the silent-screen carnie grotesques of Lon Chaney (Sr), French grand-guignol theatre and the classic tradition of European gothic literature into a Hollywood genre as defined, marketable and codified as the western or the gangster picture. The studio's output – made by Americans like Tod Browning and European imports like James Whale and Karl Freund – devised the stylised look that would dominate horror for decades, created a hierarchy of stars (most prominently Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi – though Claude Rains is in as many of the films in this set) and characters (all of these monsters have had long screen careers and remain in active development) and coined any number of clichés (the hunchbacked assistant, the torch-bearing mob).

Other studios imitated this mode, in their own style: Warners made hardboiled, wisecracking horrors such as *Doctor X* and *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, whereas Paramount did classy yet perverse literary work like *Island of Lost Souls* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Later cycles tried to break from the template, though Val Lewton's *Cat People* is as much a bookend to Universal's *The Wolf Man* as it is a break from its hairy tradition, and the modern horrors of *Psycho* or *Night of the Living Dead* still evoke Universal with their gothic houses and sunset graveyards. Decisions made by filmmakers in crafting Universal's versions of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*, the werewolf legend and so on are still shaping the way that films on these themes are made. To pick a random example, Vincenzo Natali's 2009 genetic experimentation movie *Splice* not only names its characters after the stars of *The Bride of Frankenstein* but also picks up debates about science, parenthood, monstrosity and responsibility from James Whale's 1935 film. How many contemporary



Creature feature: Boris Karloff in 'Bride of Frankenstein'

war movies are in active dialogue with, say, Universal's 1930 *All Quiet on the Western Front*?

Later, after most of the movies in this set were made, new regimes at the studio kicked off a slightly different franchise with films such as *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943) – a trend that led, perhaps inevitably, to other monster rallies and even meetings with Abbott and Costello. The films in this set were originally marketed to general audiences – without a horror genre as such to marginalise, there was no ghetto to stick them in, though disapproving critics (and the BBFC) soon found one. But the 1940s sequels were aimed at kids, and there was a significant revival of popularity when they began appearing on television in the late 1950s, prompting a flowering of 'monster kid' culture, which included Aurora glow-in-the-dark hobby kits (I had them all), *Famous Monsters* magazine, *The Munsters* and other fond tributes.

Universal's varied horror output – which ran the gamut from Poe and Dickens and Doyle adaptations to B series like the *Inner Sanctum* mysteries – has been downplayed in this new box-set, and a pantheon of monsters has been created, spanning the years from *Dracula* (debuted 1931) to *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). This means that the many, many variant releases of the backlist have sometimes

The studio's output coined any number of clichés – the hunchbacked assistant, the torch-bearing mob

been oddly assembled: the set includes three of James Whale's horror films (*Frankenstein*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*) but not his equally important *The Old Dark House*, while vaulting lesser work like the stodgy (if gorgeous, in this Blu-ray transfer) 1943 remake of *Phantom of the Opera* over major films such as Edgar G. Ulmer's Karloff-and-Lugosi-starring (but monster-free) *The Black Cat*.

These are films that I've owned in successive home-video media; there have already been three DVD issues of several of them, and that means an accretion of special features (some of which – full disclosure – I've contributed to) from edition to edition. As a result, this set feels enormously footnoted without having much new material included beyond some interesting snippets about restoration and the studio's 100th anniversary.

The big draw for this set, which is an essential cornerstone purchase, is the representation of eight familiar films (nine, if you include the Spanish-language version of *Dracula*, shot on the same sets) in new, restored transfers. Simply put, these films haven't looked this good since their first release, and the Hi Def brings out all manner of things that had been too easy to overlook: the swirling eyeballs behind the credits of *Frankenstein*; tiny details of Jack Pierce's outstanding makeup creations for the *Frankenstein* Monster, his bride, the mummy and the Wolf Man; Karloff's tears in the climax of *Bride*; and, for the first time on home video, a 3D version of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, a monster whose pop eyes and lunging claws were designed for third-dimensional viewing. S

New releases

 critical neglect. Why, after all, should we bother about beautiful, comfortably off Rosalie (Romy Schneider, virtually a muse for Sautet), let alone César (Yves Montand, another regular), the wealthy scrap-metal merchant she's been with since the demise of her first marriage, or David (Sami Frey), an artist and old flame who turns up after years abroad and tries to win her back? Their only evident problems seem to be jealousy, insecurity and indecision, since Sautet lets the wider sociopolitical context go hang. Yet in his warm, wryly amused way, Sautet *does* care about these flawed, needy, thoroughly human individuals, and the film's strength lies partly in the delicate balance maintained between sympathetic interest and gently ironic detachment.

That's why it's impossible to pin the film down as comedy, romantic (melo)drama or a sly, sometimes unsettling study of male pride, possessiveness and vanity. Sautet composes it as if it were a piece of music, and (a contrived if engaging coda apart) the shifts in mood can be smooth or agreeably surprising. César's sentimental journey especially is a case in point, played by Montand with considerable skill and suitably questionable charm. Indeed, the performances throughout are as expressive as Sautet's frequently dynamic but never florid *mise en scène*. Watch out especially for a young Isabelle Huppert.

Disc: The transfer is impressive and there's an interesting documentary on the film's genesis.

EATING RAOUl

Paul Bartel; USA 1982; Criterion/Region A/1 Blu-ray and DVD; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary featuring screenwriter Richard Blackburn, production designer Robert Schulenberg and editor Alan Toomayan, 'The Secret Cinema' and 'Naughty Nurse' short films, documentary, outtakes, archival interview with Paul Bartel and Mary Woronov, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Peter Tonguette

The final word in culture-clash comedy, Paul Bartel's *Eating Raoul* presents a war between swingers and prigs. Exemplifying the latter category are marrieds Paul and Mary Bland (played by Bartel and Warhol superstar Mary Woronov). They reside in Los Angeles in the 1980s, but Mayberry (the folksy setting of *The Andy Griffith Show*) in the 1950s would be a better fit. The Blands work long hours (Paul as a wine merchant, Mary as a nurse), pay their bills (until their coffers run dry) and long to open a restaurant with a name so homespun that First Lady Nancy Reagan would find it appealing: 'Paul and Mary's Country Kitchen'.

Such is the Blands' devotion to domesticity that it is hard to know how they ended up in the bacchanal of southern California, whose sexually liberated denizens won't take no for an answer – they creep up behind our twosome in the hallway and break through their door, like the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead*. In fact, *Eating Raoul* has the simplicity – and relentlessness – of a good horror movie. The Blands are never safe. Even a trip to the bank to secure a loan for their restaurant is fraught with peril – the nerdy-looking clerk (Buck Henry) makes a move on Mary. Bartel and co-writer



Square peg: Mary Woronov in 'Eating Raoul'

Richard Blackburn manage the same rare feat that James Ivory did in *Mr and Mrs Bridge* (1990), his droll celebration of WASP attitudes. As critic David Denby wrote of that film: "The movie achieves the almost impossible task of making American provinciality and squareness, if not appealing, at least plausible and interesting."

But *Eating Raoul* takes a troubling turn after the Blands start killing their very un-square neighbours and pocketing their money. Until this point, the Blands have been comically sympathetic, plagued by the modern world and not wrong to be scornful of it, and the rotund, bearded, altogether Santa Claus-like Bartel is paired with the formidably tall and lean Woronov to make a believably outraged couple. When someone wonders if Paul "swings", the very word grates, while Paul's moaning reply of "wrong!" is almost affecting. Yet the film permits the Blands to be blithely untroubled as they carry out their murderous plan. How could two characters so mindful of two of the Seven Deadly Sins (lust and gluttony) fail to

see several others (wrath and envy) surfacing in themselves? The speed with which they take to criminality rings false, as does Mary's sudden fling with the eponymous Raoul (Robert Beltran), a thief turned co-conspirator.

In letting the Blands get their Country Kitchen (and get away scot-free), Bartel thought he was making a sophisticated point about their hypocrisy. Instead, he strains credibility, and a fine black comedy becomes merely cynical. Along the way, much fun is had (standouts include Susan Saiger as a chipper dominatrix and Ed Begley Jr as a bead-wearing sex fiend), but it is depressing that such a skilful and witty film ends up anticipating the fashionable nihilism of later, lesser directors.

Disc: Criterion's special edition includes early Bartel shorts *The Secret Cinema* and *Naughty Nurses* and new interviews with cast and crew.

HAMMER ON BLU-RAY

The Curse of Frankenstein

Terence Fisher; UK 1957; Lionsgate/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 83 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1/1.66:1; Features: commentary with Marcus Hearn and Jonathan Rigby, featurettes

Rasputin the Mad Monk

Don Sharp; UK 1966; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 92/88 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1/2.55:1; Features: commentary with Christopher Lee, Barbara Shelley, Francis Matthews and Suzan Farmer, featurettes

The Mummy's Shroud

John Gilling; UK 1967; StudioCanal Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 90/87 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: featurettes

The Devil Rides Out

Terence Fisher; UK 1968; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 96/92 minutes; Aspect Ratio



The Curse of Frankenstein A distinct mix of Brit-film quality (costumes, sets) and transgression (medical grue, Hazel Court's décolletage)

1.37:1/1.66:1; Features: commentary with Christopher Lee, Sarah Lawson and Marcus Hearn, featurettes

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The rollout of the Hammer back-catalogue on Blu-ray continues, with a degree of controversy about framing and restoration that suggests we've not seen the last releases of many of these titles. Though issued by two distributors, Lionsgate and StudioCanal, these releases all have extra features supervised by Hammer's historian Marcus Hearn, which makes for a uniformity of presentation.

In 1957 *The Curse of Frankenstein* set the Hammer horror style, with Terence Fisher's crisp direction of Jimmy Sangster's first-draft script and a reinvention of the gothic mode for lush colours. The film, which saw Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee ascend to horror stardom (Lee, reputedly, because his agent asked for less money than Bernard Bresslaw's), had a distinctive mix of Brit-film quality (costumes, sets, character acting) and transgression (medical grue, Hazel Court's décolletage, black humour) best exemplified by Cushing wiping his bloody fingers on the collar of his elegant period jacket. Fisher's *The Devil Rides Out*, a decade later, is a bookend: it was almost the last of the studio's exercises in this manner, with a polished Richard Matheson script from Dennis Wheatley's stodgy pulp novel and just a hint of subversion – Christopher Lee's savant saint is ill-mannered, high-handed and tyrannical, whereas Charles Gray's embodiment of evil is suave, magnetic, polite and almost appealing.

Lesser but still interesting are Don Sharp's *Rasputin the Mad Monk* – a lurid, barely historical setting for Lee's remarkable performance as a hairy-handed, glowing-eyed, cruelly lusty Rasputin – and John Gilling's *The Mummy's Shroud*, one of the first Hammers to play up the icy camp through bizarre supporting work (Catherine Lacey as a cackling hag, Michael Ripper as a short-sighted minion) and slasher-style serial murders. *Rasputin* was tailored to sets left over from *Dracula Prince of Darkness*, and *The Mummy's Shroud* seems to have been scripted out of leftovers, but both rattle along nicely, with hands lopped off, acid thrown in faces, heads crushed and monsters crumbling to dust. The *Curse* release also includes Fisher's earlier Hammer science-fiction film *Four Sided Triangle*, which is fairly stuffy but thematically interesting, and Hammer's weird, aborted TV pilot *Tales of Frankenstein*, with Anton Diffring as a Cushing-style Frankenstein and Don Megowan as a Karloff-look Monster.

Discs: *Curse* and *Rasputin* are both represented in variant aspect ratios: *Curse* in its open-matte Academy TV safe form (lots of headroom) and a 1.66:1 'theatrical' presentation which frames better than the 1.85:1 used in previous DVD releases (a close-up of some disembodied eyes is restored), while *Rasputin* is seen in two variant CinemaScope ratios which perhaps emphasise the studio's inability to depict period St Petersburg in epic style. More controversial is *The Devil Rides Out*, which has had its effects work extensively 'restored', tweaking some matte fringes that have always been an eyesore (to justify this, the children of effects man/



Casual magic: 'Mundane History'

producer Michael Staiver-Hutchins turn up to admit that their father was disappointed) but also adding (or 'finishing') some shots that might have been left-in placeholders or simply the best that could be done in 1967. The work is tactful and plays well without drawing attention to the new effects, but it's odd that, whereas the *Curse* and *Rasputin* releases include variant versions which differ only in aspect ratio, the unrestored *Devil* isn't on the same disc, so Hammer purists will have to hang on to their old DVDs.

LONDON: THE MODERN BABYLON

Julien Temple; UK 2012; BFI/Region 2 DVD; 128 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: interview with Julien Temple, booklet with essays by Jonathan Romney and John Wyver

Reviewed by Sam Davies

London, standing at the gravitational centre of the UK's political, cultural and economic life, has never exactly wanted for chroniclers or cheerleaders. And Julien Temple's film comes at the end of a decade especially full of hymns to the city, from Peter Ackroyd's vast prose histories through to the Olympic hype machine which has only recently ground down the gears.

What's Temple's angle? In mood and method, it's a kind of inversion of Patrick Keiller's *London* (1994). Where Keiller's film was private, indirect, ruminating, singular, Temple's is vast, garrulous, plural. As if deliberately emulating the irresistible onward momentum of the Thames, it churns relentlessly forward through a visual history of London's last century or so.

Temple begins with the earliest Victorian films of London life and takes his title from that period, before going on to tease out the various connotations of Babylon: spectacular, imperial, decadent (Soho), a babel of voices (Brixton, Southall, Brick Lane), a symbol of state power (riot police have a recurring cameo). But while Temple registers the darker side of the city, *Modern Babylon* is always at heart a celebration and tribute, in particular to the idea of London as a multicultural metropolis – perhaps, Temple argues, the pre-eminent example of such a city's possibility. It's a well-made argument, weaving together imagery from archives and film history – Basil Dearden's *Sapphire* (1959), for instance, when discussing post-Windrush race relations – to create a cinematic history of London that's also a de facto history of London cinema. *Modern Babylon* is essentially a tissue of archival quotation, moving from 35mm to home 16mm,

Super 8 and on to DV, and it's refreshing not to have a parade of talking heads: the few we see are eyewitnesses rather than experts, such as the 104-year-old veteran of the Battle of Cable Street. Temple's editing is frenetic, and as an attempt to contain multitudes and overwhelm with colour and detail, it rehearses similar moves from his 2006 documentary *Glastonbury*.

Yet *London: The Modern Babylon* is constrained, whether by a lack of imagination, a sense of having to hit certain notes and references, or both. One example: it plays in on The Clash's 'London Calling' and out on The Kinks' 'Waterloo Sunset', a flatly predictable (Hackneyed?) piece of bookending. The music frustrates elsewhere: a punk product, Temple defaults all too often to that era (laying X-Ray Spex's 'Oh Bondage, Up Yours!' over footage of suffragettes). There's not a bar of jungle, 2-step or grime – hugely innovative scenes and sounds that originated in London rather than being imported and reinvented.

One of the film's strongest sequences concerns post-Blitz London, a rubble-strewn, cratered landscape described as "the capital city of the moon". This kind of vision, making the familiar strange rather than dutifully tracing the same old lines, could have featured more. Indeed, on Temple's own argument for London as an ever-renewing city of immigrants, perhaps its story would have been better told by an incoming arrival rather than a native. **Disc:** Sitting in the back of a moving black cab, Temple discusses the film in a six-minute interview.

MUNDANE HISTORY

Anocha Suwichakornpong; Thailand 2009; Second Run/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 78 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: Suwichakornpong's 2006 short 'Graceland'; Suwichakornpong interview, booklet, trailer

Reviewed by Sam Wigley

Spurned by theatrical distributors in the UK, *Mundane History* arrives on DVD as a delayed revelation. Grappling around for reference points while watching these succinct 78 minutes, you might alight on Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) or Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), two Palme d'Or winners, which director Anocha Suwichakornpong's less heralded treat tantalisingly pre-echoes.

The film proceeds in unique structural undulations, in which scenes not signalled as flashbacks lead up to a point of action we've already seen, before looping back once more to describe an earlier story increment. This subtle means of mystification – like a languid, less attention-seeking variant on the fractured stop-starts of *Memento* (2000) – embellishes what to all initial appearances is the muted story of a male nurse, Pun (Arkaney Cherkham), tending a paralysed youth, Ake (Phakpoom Surapongsanuruk), in the home of Ake's estranged father.

The late-coming opening credits, the pausing over the quotidian detail of clinical care, the casual magic of filmed half-light or a breeze in the trees – all gesture backwards and forwards to Apichatpong's



WACKY RACE RELATIONS

Hal Ashby's prickly 1970 satire – shepherded to the screen by Norman Jewison – tackles the subject of race with a mix of whimsy, wit and rage

THE LANDLORD

Hal Ashby; USA 1970; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 112 minutes; Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1; Features:

Reviewed by Ryan Gilbey

The success of *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) was profound and chastening enough to make its white Canadian director Norman Jewison an honorary black filmmaker in Hollywood's eyes, a position he then capitalised on with *A Soldier's Story* in 1984 and *The Hurricane* in 1999. (He was in the running for a Malcolm X biopic until objections from Spike Lee among others, as well as reported script problems, put paid to that stewardship.)

His greatest contribution to the drama of race relations may have been in shepherding to the screen the prickly 1970 satire *The Landlord*. Jewison was scheduled to make the film himself but found his time consumed by preparations for *Fiddler on the Roof*. He proposed *The Landlord* as the directing debut of Hal Ashby, who had won an Academy Award for editing *In the Heat of the Night*. The result, largely unseen since its release, would not have happened without Jewison, but its mixture of whimsy and rage, wackiness and social commentary, is recognisably that of the maker of *Harold and Maude* (1971), *The Last Detail* (1973) and *Shampoo* (1975) – as is the intuitive use of music, with Al Kooper a worthy 11th-hour replacement for Neil Young.

The Landlord tells of the pampered young twit Elgar Enders (Beau Bridges), white of skin and suit, who snaps up some dilapidated Brooklyn real estate, only to be transformed by his contact with the tenants he'd planned to drive out. In the late 1960s, Park Slope was not the gentrified hipster haven of today. Ashby hired local toughs as security; Nick Dawson, in his book *Being Hal Ashby*, reports that a chase scene shot with a long lens, in which Bridges is pursued by Louis Gossett Jr, was cheered on by gullible residents shouting, "Kill that white motherfucker!"

There's a broadness to the initial culture-clash when Elgar pitches up in Brooklyn – while he's lugging potted plants to his tenement, urchins are relieving his convertible of its hubcaps. But the film is capable of real subtlety. A montage of Elgar's drive back into Manhattan uses a handful of jump cuts to chart the changes in his body language and posture as he returns to the comforts of the WASPs' nest.

It is that privileged milieu, all tennis whites and soused suppers, which succumbs most readily to caricature. The cinematographer Gordon Willis, who had yet to shoot the films that would make his name (*Klute*, *The Godfather*),

bathes the Enders mansion and gardens in nullifying white light, just as the script bleaches out most of the nuances in the characters here with the exception of Elgar's mother (played by Lee Grant, who received an Oscar nomination). She at least gets the rare privilege of having cutaways to her thought process: on hearing her son say, "I'm in love with a girl who's a Negro," she instantly calls to mind stock footage of a gyrating African tribeswoman.

The Brooklyn scenes, which take up the lion's share of the picture, are more richly textured in their visual palette (shots of mud-red tenements and the dense debris of razed buildings have a power that reaches beyond the archival) as well as their analysis

It's the privileged milieu of tennis whites and soused suppers that succumbs most readily to caricature

of racial divisions and rapprochements. The screenplay – adapted by the playwright-novelist-actor-director Bill Gunn from Kristin Hunter's novel – flirts with the possibility of racial blindness even as it picks over the tensions that make such a concept unworkable, at least among this set of characters.

Identity is up for grabs. Hitting on Lanie (Marki Bey) in a club, Elgar mistakenly believes her to be white, while another character mentioned is referred to as a former Sioux who's now black; Elgar turns the n-word against his family, and a white partygoer wears boot-polish blackface as he mingles with African-American waiters at a charity shindig. Ashby extends these ideas into his visual choices, drenching in red light an entire scene between Elgar and Lanie, rendering them theoretically race-less. Jewison may not have got to make *Malcolm X*, but *The Landlord* is certainly fit to stand alongside Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000) in the Blockbuster Video section marked Complex Disquisitions on Race. **S**



Tenancy disagreement: Beau Bridges wrestles with Louis Gossett Jr in 'The Landlord'

New releases

◀ filmography and are the surest clue that some sort of necromancy is afoot. Like her countryman, Suwichakornpong has a half-time unexpected moment up her sleeve, in which the scope of her vision rushes outwards like a rapidly expanding supernova, moving from chamber drama to a Malickian contemplation of our place in the universe. With counterweighting modesty, this tear in the film's fabric – dazzling but borderline top-heavy in such an unassuming miniature – is then folded back into the logic of the narrative, explained away by another structural pleat. But its implications linger like retinal burn, and Suwichakornpong's coup marks an underseen debut feature of startling audacity.

Disc: A crisp, director-approved HD transfer of the film comes supplemented with a 15-minute video interview with Suwichakornpong, her 2006 short film *Graceland*, and an enlightening booklet essay by S&S contributor Carmen Gray which suggests Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975) as an antecedent of *Mundane History*'s memory-trace montage sequences.

THE PENALTY

Wallace Worsley; US 1920; Kino/Region 1 Blu-ray and DVD; 87 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: essays, video tour of Chaney's makeup case, theatrical trailers from 'The Big City' and 'While the City Sleeps'; surviving footage of 'The Miracle Man'; Chaney's 1914 one-reel western 'By the Sun's Rays'; scene comparison, production budget sheet, gallery of photographs and artwork

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Well before James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson were shooting up the Warner Bros lot, master of disguise Lon Chaney starred in a number of pungent gangster films filled with grisly violence and twisty plots predicated on random bad luck. *The Penalty* features a gruesome prologue in which a boy's legs are needlessly amputated by an inept doctor after a traffic accident, a mistake hushed up by another doctor on duty. The victimised boy grows up to be Chaney's embittered Blizzard, a king of the underworld in San Francisco's Barbary Coast neighbourhood. A harsh-faced man nimbly swinging himself around on two leather stumps and terrorising the men and women who serve him, he's referred to as "that cripple from hell".

Chaney makes Blizzard a three-dimensional antihero seething with a thirst for vengeance, glowering with satanic malice and then burning with a broken man's regret when his guard is down. He's a very subtle actor, letting us into the warp and weft of Blizzard's tortured thoughts, but keeping an essential privacy too. Chaney is the opposite of a ham; when he grabs one of his girls by the hair and yells at her, he takes no pleasure from it, and he isn't kidding either.

The plot of *The Penalty* gets a bit convoluted (there are two female love interests, neither of whom makes much impression), and the ending is a cop-out, but this is one of Chaney's most impressively committed early performances.

Disc: The image looks pristine. For extras, there's a tour of Chaney's makeup



Mourning glory: 'The Second Circle'

kit by his biographer Michael F. Blake and an explanation of how he strapped his legs up into those stumps for *The Penalty*. We also get the only surviving footage of Chaney's first big success, *The Miracle Man* (1919), in which he played a conman who pretends to be crippled, and a primitive one-reel western starring Chaney from 1914, *By the Sun's Rays*.

PRIVATE HELL 36

Don Siegel; USA 1954; Olive Films/Region 1; 81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Right away it's clear that *Private Hell 36* – the title alone! – isn't your typical *Dragnet*-era cop flick. A narrator makes what seems to be an ironic crack about Detective Sergeant Cal Bruner's "trained eyes and ears" as the cop notices a display very obviously tumbling forwards in a closed pharmacy's window. Following this telltale clue to find perps within, in a scene filmed by director Don Siegel with almost Bressonian grace and economy, Bruner shoots one and beats the other into submission – not with the traditional 'one clean shot on the chin and out cold' method, but through a savage donnybrook that ends with Bruner on top of his unconscious prey, pounding his face into the pavement.

Bruner is played by Steve Cochran, a louche, bushy-browed Irish-American actor best remembered as Big Ed Somers in *White Heat* (1949) and as the hero of Antonioni's *Il grido* (1957). Cochran's soulful skeeviness predicts doppelganger Colin Farrell's, and is put to excellent use here – after collaring the criminal, Bruner gripes in the locker room to

his family-man partner Jack (Howard Duff) about messing up his blazer, while slathering himself in Old Oak cologne. Cal and Jack are assigned to follow the trail of a marked bill from the pharmacy robbery which connects it to an earlier heist in NYC. This leads them to Lilli Marlowe, a hard-faced lounge singer who kickstarts her day with straight slugs of vodka (Ida Lupino, who co-wrote the screenplay, and whose independent company The Filmmakers produced), and finally, after a car chase fatal to the pursued, to the money itself.

Despite his worried, conscientious partner's objections, Bruner decides to pocket a part of the loot so that he can afford the company of Miss Marlowe, making *Private Hell 36* one of the period's handful of crooked-cop movies – Joseph Losey's *The Prowler* (1951) also springs to mind – while its theme of disenfranchised law enforcement looks ahead to Siegel's own *Dirty Harry* (1971). Along with the film's feel for tatty roadside California, including location shooting at the Hollywood Park racetrack, the great attraction is the knowing, unbuttoned, been-around-the-block rapport between Lupino and Cochran – fedora rakishly pushed back on head, perpetually slouched, gum-chewing, belching, sidelong grinning at private jokes, all-around not-giving-a-fuck. The casually lascivious performance style may have been encouraged, per reports in Siegel's autobiography, by copious on-the-clock drinking (a young David 'Sam' Peckinpah was dialogue director – and probable mixologist) and the he-harem nature of the set (personnel included Lupino's then husband Duff, her co-screenwriter and ex Collier Young and lover Cochran). Whatever the case, the result is one of the most unsavoury bits of fiction reportage scraped from the Eisenhower era's underbelly.

Disc: Nothing to report but a helluva a movie.

THE ALEXANDER SOKUROV COLLECTION

Save and Protect/The Second Circle/Elegy of Life

Russia 1989/1990/2006; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 127/86/101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3/16:9 anamorphic

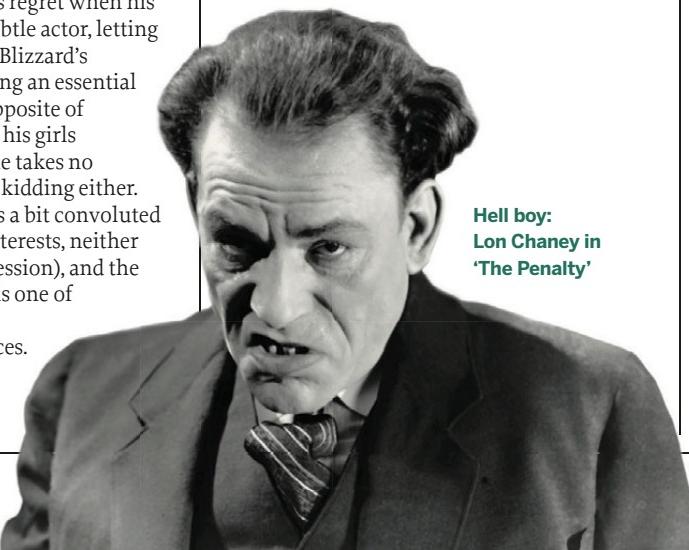
Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Artificial Eye's welcome sift through Sokurov's back-catalogue has resulted in a box-set combining two of his earlier fiction features with one of his most recent documentary 'elegies'.

Save and Protect is the longest, although this Sokurov-revised version from 2009 has jettisoned half an hour from its original cut. A notably earthy (and fleshy) take on *Madame Bovary*, it shows the alienated Emma repeatedly rutting like an animal, often outdoors, seemingly more out of chemical addiction than grand passion, while her pretensions towards cultural sophistication (she often speaks French to the others' Russian) are undermined by the constant encroachment of flies and feathers and the isolation of the mountain village in which she dreams her impossible dreams.

Shot in sepia-tinted monochrome, *The Second Circle* is an even more intense psychological study, this time of a grief

**Hell boy:
Lon Chaney in
'The Penalty'**



New releases

 so paralysing that it saps the unnamed protagonist's ability to achieve much more than basic motor functions. Nominally charged with disposing of his late father's corpse and effects, he is a hapless pawn in the hands of unsympathetic officials who can price their notionally essential services to the nearest kopeck (his relationship with the undertaker Nadezhda lurches the film into grimly Beckettian comedy) but who show not the slightest understanding of what he's going through. Presumably out of professional necessity, but that's scant comfort.

Elegy of Life – or *Elegy of Life, Rostropovich*. *Vishnevskaya*, to give it its full title – is Sokurov's typically allusive portrait of cellist-conductor Mstislav Rostropovich and soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, great cultural figures whose lives by 2006 were primarily behind them (Rostropovich would die the following year). It's part formal interview (Sokurov is the onscreen foil), part candid observation, part philosophical reflection on everything from the existence and depth of the Russian soul to living in exile without an officially recognised nationality. Performance footage is sparser than one might expect, but that increases its impact when it appears: Rostropovich thrillingly premieres a Penderecki cello concerto, and Sokurov cuts to Vishnevskaya singing a Tchaikovsky lament after he's coaxed from her a clear-eyed reminiscence about the death of her baby son when she was still a teenager.

Discs: The two cinema features get excellent transfers and optional subtitles (the source prints are a bit pockmarked at times but not to any distracting extent), while *Elegy of Life* has a few onscreen glitches reflecting its interlaced video origins, plus burned-in subtitles whose transliteration of names isn't always in line with western spelling (Brittan, Penderetsky).

THE SOUND AND THE FURY

Martin Ritt, USA 1959; Twilight Time/Region A Blu-ray; 105 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: isolated score track

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

William Faulkner, Great American Novelist, squire of Rowan Oak and sometimes screenwriter-for-hire, had a long and tetchy relationship with Hollywood, epitomised by the famous story of the distinguished litterateur deceptively asking Darryl Zanuck's permission to 'work from home' – then fleeing California for his ancestral Mississippi. Faulkner's film assignments included writing dialogue for Egyptian monarchy in the orotund voice of a Kentucky colonel for 1955's *Land of the Pharaohs*, at the behest of blackout-drinking buddy Howard Hawks; as for adaptations from his novels, it is considered most telling of the relationship between the media that the greatest film from Faulkner, Douglas Sirk's 1957 *The Tarnished Angels*, was based on *Pylon*, one of his least distinguished books.

The Sound and the Fury is, conversely, among Faulkner's acknowledged masterpieces – and thus sacred ground to tread upon. Director Martin Ritt, star Joanne Woodward, producer Jerry Wald and the screenwriters Harriet Frank Jr and Irving Ravetch had just 'done' Faulkner



Strange bird: 'The Sterile Cuckoo'

rather preposterously in 1958's *The Long, Hot Summer*, which featured Orson Welles overindulging his fondness for putty noses.

The Ritt-Wald Faulkner films were made at a time when Hollywood had a particular passion for Southern subjects, and when it was thought – particularly by conscientious liberals – that the American experiment was best understood in its essence south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, however, was created on Fox's lot in Century City, including a well-done version of the decaying family seat of the Compsons, former gentry come down in the world. The parlour walls are a particular shade of nauseous green native to that corner of Mississippi – you can see it too in William Eggleston's 1970s photographs from the same country – marked with water damage and telltale signs where pawned-off paintings once hung.

While extracting key anecdotes from Faulkner's novel, Ritt and Wald's *The Sound and the Fury* makes no attempt to adopt the author's epic, generation-hopping, multiple-narrator structure. The film focuses on Quinten (Woodward, all big busy hands and worried jaw), the abandoned teenage daughter of Caddy Compson, and her testy relationship with her half-uncle guardian Jason (stentorian Yul Brynner – who here is not a blood relation as in the book, to soften incestuous implications and explain Brynner's accent by Acadian descent). Rounding out the cast is English actress Margaret Leighton as prodigal alleycat Caddy, with wilted permanent and eyes like tawdry costume jewellery, whipped by the world but still swanning about.

Taken on its own, it is a well-performed and often touching piece of ensemble work – but it leaves one with a distinct feeling that Faulkner was only settled on because Tennessee Williams couldn't keep up with demand.

Disc: An isolated score track allows further appreciation of composer Alex North's hothouse jazz whenever carnie hunk Stuart Whitman saunters on to the screen.

THE STERILE CUCKOO

Alan J. Pakula; USA 1969; Olive Films/Region 1 DVD; 107 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Liza Minnelli had only appeared in a small part in Albert Finney's *Charlie Bubbles* (1967) before starring in Alan J. Pakula's debut film as a director, *The Sterile Cuckoo*, and she was



Spirited away: 'The Uninvited'

obviously raring to go, approaching the well-written role of outcast Pookie Adams like a hungry man sitting down to a seven-course feast. There's really no one else in the movie but Pookie, who stridently accosts the reserved Jerry (Wendell Burton) as they take a bus to college and pushily inserts herself into his life. Right away, it's clear that Pookie is a close cousin to Julie Harris's Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding* (1952), but much more damaged than the lyrical Frankie, more of a loser, more manipulative, more destructive. It's plausible that the nice, dim Jerry would initially be drawn to Pookie's energy, and it's also plausible that he would finally have to gently push her away.

The Sterile Cuckoo is visually slack and uninspired, and sometimes technically inept. In one of many expendable montages set to the plaintive song 'Come Saturday Morning', Jerry and Pookie are out of focus as they walk along a leaf-strewn beach, then come into focus, and then go out of focus again, and this literal visual problem points to how Pakula is unable to control his promising material.

If this rather amorphous film remains worth seeing, and it does, it's due to Minnelli, who never plays for sympathy and makes this girl a monstrous problem child, a forlorn bundle of negative energy who projects her own self-hatred on to the world around her, calling the other kids "weirdos" or "creeps" when she knows full well that she's the real weirdo and creep. Even in a virtuoso telephone monologue that begs for pathetic Luise Rainer touches, Minnelli reveals the anger that lies behind Pookie's hard, calculating eyes.

Disc: The image is grainy and dirty, and the DVD case prints the title as *Sterile Cuckoo* instead of *The Sterile Cuckoo*.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Ernst Lubitsch; USA 1932; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2; Certificate TBC; 82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: filmed interview with Kent Jones and Dan Sallitt, illustrated booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

One of Lubitsch's first collaborations with screenwriter Samson Raphaelson (and his first non-musical talkie), this worldly, fleet-footed romantic comedy created the template for classic screwball well before *It Happened One Night* happened along. It crackles with aural as well as visual pleasure, and its talk darts in directions as teasingly indirect as the camerawork,

as courting crooks Miriam Hopkins and Herbert Marshall employ fond accusations of theft as foreplay, or Kay Francis's heiress muses in pre-Code fashion that, "Marriage is a beautiful mistake made by two people."

Ironically, Raphaelson, whose dialogue contributes so much to the film's nimble wit, its disarming characters and its whip-smart observations of human fun and frailty, preferred his later, sweeter Lubitsch collaboration *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), finding the characters in this knowing love-triangle too puppet-like. Yet it's the precision-engineering that goes into constructing Lubitsch Land that's captivating here, a perfect meshing of form and content (as Dan Sallitt observes in the extras), where the famous flurry of bedroom doors between Francis and Marshall says everything their teasing dialogue doesn't. Everyone is deftly concealing something, including Lubitsch, who traces his characters' desires lightly but insistently in mirrored reflections, bed-borne shadows and throwaway remarks.

The frisky narrative is a grown-ups' game of hide-and-seek, which uses Hans Dreier's high-style art-deco settings as exuberantly as a playground. But behind the froth and bubble one can discern Depression-era realities, as exemplified by Marshall's playfully cynical quotation of Herbert Hoover's famous 1932 platitude: "Prosperity is just around the corner."

Disc: A pleasant transfer. The only significant extra is an enjoyably erudite and rambling filmed discussion between critics Kent Jones and Dan Sallitt, which more than compensates for the lack of audio commentary

THE UNINVITED

Lewis Allen; USA 1944; Exposure Cinema/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: trailer, radio dramatisations, booklet, stills gallery

Reviewed by Kim Newman

One of Hollywood's first attempts at a serious ghost story, this relatively lavish Paramount production (based on *Uneasy Freehold*, a novel by the Irish writer Dorothy Macardle) was plainly influenced by Val Lewton's cycle of low-budget chillers. Gauntly glamorous Elizabeth Russell, a Lewton regular best remembered as the other cat woman in 1942's *Cat People*, is recognisable as the model for a portrait that plays a significant part in the story here. (Like *Rebecca* and *Laura*, this makes a fetish of a picture that stands in for the not-quite-absent woman who haunts the film.) In a peculiar, extra-narrative instance of ominous doubling, the young woman most in peril from the malign ghost is played by the frail, unearthly Gail Russell, whose real name was also Elizabeth Russell.

The general classiness of the film runs to sophisticated dialogue rattled off by Ray Milland and Ruth Hussey as urbanite siblings who buy a clifftop house in Cornwall; a memorably romantic/shivery Victor Young score which spun off the popular song 'Stella by Starlight'; and a tactful approach to the story's paranormal activity that depends as much on performance as camera tricks. Some quite transgressive material was somehow sneaked past the Hays Office, including a



Trouble in Paradise This fleet-footed romantic comedy created the template for classic screwball well before 'It Happened One Night' happened along

seething Cornelia Otis Skinner as the ghost's maniacal lesbian admirer (another Lewton theme) and a happy ending which hinges on the revelation that the heroine is the daughter of her father's sensual mistress, not his frigid wife. It was Lewis Allen's first film, and he never did anything quite as striking again.

Disc: The most interesting extras are two radio adaptations, which trim or rearrange different sections of the story to get it told inside 25 minutes.

UPTIGHT

Jules Dassin; USA 1968; Olive Films/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 104 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

A totally forgotten civil-rights American New Wave freakout and the first film that blacklistee Jules Dassin had shot on American soil since *Thieves' Highway* in 1949, *Up Tight!* (as it was called on its release) is a rather inspired transposition of Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* from Ireland to inner-city Cleveland amid the churning of black militancy. However much you may detect the odour of earnest white liberalism (Dassin did do time for his ideals), it's a pure-hearted slice of ghetto hyperdrama, coming three years before the advent of blaxploitation.

Co-writer Julian Mayfield, sweating like a proto-Forest Whitaker, plays Tank, the avatar of O'Flaherty's Gypo – a drunken oaf hanging on to the fringe of the local revolutionary underground and, once he's officially ostracised, trading in what he knows for reward money and thereby sealing his own fate. Beginning with lengthy footage of Martin Luther King's televised funeral, Dassin's long-delayed return

to the US garnered him assistance from a surprising roster of leftie artistes – the DP is Boris Kaufman, the credits are animated by John and Faith Hubley, Ruby Dee co-wrote the screenplay and starred, and the score is by Memphis soul pioneers Booker T and the MGs.

Something of a low-budget indie production but released by Paramount, *Uptight* was almost certainly the first film centred on the rise of armed militancy groups like the Black Panthers and their notion of inevitable race war. True to Dassin's legacy and agenda, the movie traffics mostly in overwrought righteousness and confrontational hubris, and it's the latter payload that amazes today, particularly in the raging revolutionary-cell debate scenes, in which a veteran activist is ousted only because he is white, and divisions within the black community are drawn with lit gasoline. (Blacks profiting from 'opportunity programmes' are regarded with a sneer.)

But Dassin was still a tried-and-true *noiriste*, with a cops' siege on a balconied tenement building that's dynamic and dense. (Dassin's eye for details is sharp – the Cleveland Indians' essentially racist baseball team mascot, Chief Wahoo, is seen everywhere.) He's also up to the era's post-Godard experimentalism, staging a confrontation between Mayfield's self-immolating fugitive and a farcical gaggle of white race-conflict tourists in a carnival arcade, complete with amused questions about the militants' 'plan' to kill Whitey shot through distorting funhouse mirrors. All told, an emblematic film of its time, seeing daylight for the first time in decades.

Disc: A typical archive-to-Olive transfer, with no bonuses.

THE BIG KID WITH A BIKE

Chris Peterson is a deluded man-child, a celebrity-obsessed no-hoper. He's also one of the great comic creations of 1990s American television

GET A LIFE: THE COMPLETE SERIES

Shout Factory; USA 1990-92; 840 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: commentaries, cast and crew reunion, featurette featuring James L. Brooks and Judd Apatow

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

You might recognise him from cameos in the Farrelly brothers' movies, or as the guy wearing a distracting beard in *The Abyss* (1989), but if you haven't sat down to get uncomfortable with Chris Elliott's misshapen body of work, you've been missing out on one of the most important renegade strains in American comedy over the past three decades.

Having gained a following with his absurdist skits on *Late Night with David Letterman*, Elliott conceived sitcom vehicle *Get a Life* with Letterman writer Adam Resnick and producer David Mirkin, who'd courted Elliott while trying to create a US version of *The Young Ones* (a show whose penchant for live-action cartoon violence would carry over to their eventual collaboration). *Get a Life* debuted in 1990 – the year of *Twin Peaks*, the year surrealism went primetime – on a still-young Fox Network, whose programming included the Brechtian *It's Garry Shandling's Show*, *The Simpsons* and *Married... with Children* (whose working title, *NOT the Cosby Show*, says a great deal about the network's defined-in-opposition identity during its pioneer years).

Elliott stars as Chris Peterson, a husky 30-year-old Dennis the Menace who lives over the garage of his parents' suburban home and has no gainful employment other than the paper round he's kept for the last two decades. Chris's triangularising uniform begins with huge, unsightly khakis, continues through a popped-collar polo shirt and terminates in a pea-head – fuzzily balding, google-eyed, turtle-lipped, with a chinstrap beard. Announcing his infantilism with a Baby Huey waddle, Chris is prone to grotesquely coy and coquettish capering, to dancing like a marionette whose operator has just had a seizure, to inexplicable facial tics and fervid monologues which give serious reason to doubt his sanity. He wears a cow's-tooth necklace and keeps a noose in his back pocket; he casually says things like, "I've thrown up a hundred times today and that's two more than normal" and is altogether incapable of formulating a normal response to anything; and he rivals George Costanza as the great comic creation of 1990s US television.

Blissfully oblivious to the socially despised reality of his existence, Chris wakes every morning with a fresh delusion to pursue,

impervious to the devastating sarcastic put-downs of his elderly parents, who are perpetually installed in the kitchen, wearing their bathrobes. (The duo are Bob Elliott, Chris's father and half of the great comedy duo Bob and Ray, and *Father Knows Best*'s Elinor Donahue, whose clenched cheery grin isn't far from that of the mummified Mrs Bates.)

"Gladys, do you think too much TV as a kid can make you an idiot?" is one of dad's typical jibes – and a telling one. Chris's conversation is laced with references to yesteryear's pop detritus (Buster Crabbe, "Hardy Boy extraordinaire Parker Stevenson", Rich Little) and he's obsessed with celebrity; many of the best episodes play on this stalker's impulse, or allow him to exercise his attention-starved, prima-donna side. In an episode entitled 'The Prettiest Week of My Life' he enrolls in a rip-off male modelling school; in 'Zoo Animals on Wheels' he lands the lead in a community theatre production of some Andrew Lloyd Webber-esque trash; in 'The Big City' he

For those who 'got it' at the time, it left a permanent brand on the psyche. This was primetime's deprogramming moment



Arrested development: Chris Elliott in 'Get a Life'

becomes the toast of the town in a parody of 1930s newspaper comedies (particularly *Nothing Sacred*), done with vintage stock-footage blue-screening and ending, as do many episodes, with Chris's death. (Reinforcing the programme's sense of taking place in the junk drawer of pop culture is its use of abandoned sets on the Universal City backlot.)

Despite departures into the fantastic, what makes *Get a Life* so uncannily crawlly is the fact that, looking past its mutations, it still has the basic DNA of a classic sitcom. (Elliott had previously riffed on crap TV conventions in his 1987 Showtime special *Action Family*, which mashed up *The Partridge Family* with cop-show tropes.) It looks like a sitcom, it has a laugh track like a sitcom – though it seems nervous and inappropriately raucous. But here it's the wacky next-door neighbour who's become the main identification character, and this added intimacy reveals his 'wackiness' as manifestation of a profound emotional disturbance; one of the loaded DVD's features is a commentary track with psychologist Dr Wendy Walsh, analysing Chris Peterson: "Delusional, psychotic, dependency issues... and he's not really growing at all."

True though that may be, *Get a Life* continued to progress nicely. The show's second season had Chris moving in with Gus (Brian Doyle Murray, brother of Bill), a gravel-voiced, nihilistic, alcoholic ex-cop fired for urinating on his superior. (Accompanying Chris to the morgue to look for a missing friend: "Who am I kidding? It wasn't a hunch – I just like looking at stiffs.") It also saw the addition of some kindred spirits to the writing staff, drawn to the haven of insane sanity that *Get a Life* offered amid TV's vast wasteland – both Bob Odenkirk (of genius HBO sketch show *Mr. Show*) and Charlie Kaufman have early credits, with Kaufman practising his signature lo-fi sci-fi in the penultimate episode, '1977-2000', which has Chris travelling through time to save Gus's career.

No less an effort could have salvaged *Get a Life*, which hostile Fox execs were by then quietly burying with late Sunday-night airings. Resnick and Elliott went on to collaborate on 1994's *Cabin Boy*, a great comic-fantasy parody of MGM's high-seas adventure *Captains Courageous* (1937). Mirkin – who's heavily represented on the DVD commentary tracks – found a home at *The Simpsons*, where gonzo excess was tolerated as long as performed by yellow toons.

Held back by music-clearance issues occasioned by its frequent 'music video' montages, *Get a Life* has been only sporadically visible over the past two decades, but for those who 'got it' at the time, it left a permanent brand on the psyche. This was primetime's deprogramming moment – its equivalent to Nirvana's *Nevermind* – even if very few paid it any mind at the time. **S**

ALPHAS – SEASON 1

BermanBraun/Universal Cable Productions/Syfy; USA
2011; Universal Pictures/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 530 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: deleted scenes, fan Q&A

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

In his history of the comic book, Jules Feiffer suggests that Clark Kent, Superman's milquetoast human secret identity, was a scornful critique of Earth's citizens, for whom a saviour from outer space in effect represented a "comeuppance for the American dream". In *Alphas*, the conflict between mundanes (you and me) and superpowered mutations (them) is presented in thoroughly prosaic terms, with no costumes, caped or otherwise, for our protagonists, nor secret lairs to work out of. Instead we have office drones as likely to worry about finding change for the parking meter or bicker about the finer points of nose-picking as tap into their assorted special abilities. The protagonists include a super-strong FBI agent with anger-management issues, a light-fingered, hypnotically persuasive beauty and a high-functioning savant who sees broadcasts in the ether (a standout turn by Ryan Cartwright). Overseeing them is their psychotherapist (David Strathairn), also the conduit to shady government agencies footing the bills, who lacks super-skills if you discount his variable ability to fend off male-pattern baldness (courtesy of an inconsistent make-up department).

Lindsay Wagner appears in a *Warehouse 13* crossover episode, which while pleasant doesn't really go anywhere – a lot like the bulk of this amiable if rather formulaic series. Things perk up for the action-filled finale, which – after a particularly frugal 'bottle' episode that even saves money by having an invisible henchperson – unveils an arch-villain with a bin Laden-style plan to polarise America from within. If this all sounds a bit like a weekly version of the original *X-Men* trilogy, well *Alphas* showrunner Zak Penn co-wrote that too.

Discs: The two-channel audio is a bit underwhelming but tech credits are otherwise top-notch. The main extra is a 20-minute collection of cast and crew interviews from questions submitted via Facebook.

THE ARCATA PROMISE

Yorkshire Television/ITV; UK 1974; Network
DVD/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 92 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: stills gallery

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Anthony Hopkins, Kate Nelligan and John Fraser star in this complex three-hander, a typically stimulating and gut-wrenching play by David Mercer on the theme of a divided mind in conflict with itself.

Hopkins is John, a once great actor who has succumbed to crippling self-doubt (his inner voice's mocking moniker for him is 'Theodore Gunge'), alcoholism and impotence (or as he calls it, "genital anaesthesia"). As his ego and id engage in combat ("Why do we live like this?"), he flits back to echoes of his performance in *Richard II* ("My grief lies all within") and episodes showing the disintegration of his abusive relationship with American lover Laura



MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE

Frankie Muniz stars as the eponymous genius, learning to cope with his colossal IQ while still being a pre-teen lad

(Nelligan), his once-upon-a-time muse whose final departure has discombobulated him so. Fraser, sporting a particularly unflattering comb-over, is Tony, the camp valet who comes to take care of the performer when 'Gunge' places an ad in the paper ("Are we letting ourselves go to seed then?"). Nelligan doesn't have a lot to do except look sullen and put-upon ("I feel battered, ignored, belittled") until their final confrontation, a deliberately arch, melodramatic and faintly stupid finale.

Hopkins is by turns magisterial and seductive, whether 'performing' as a self-pitying drunk, Shakespeare's unloved king or the great actor racked by insecurity, railing against the fixity within him unable to arrest the corrosion of his spirit. ("The only ambition you have left is to demonstrate your own misery.")

Disc: Made entirely on video in the studio, the transfer to disc is problem-free.

MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE – SEASON 1

Satin City/Regency/Fox; USA 2000; Fabulous Films/
Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 574 minutes; Aspect
Ratio 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, extended
pilot, outtakes, retrospective documentary

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

And so begins what is ultimately revealed to be the most harebrained attempt by a mother to win her son the White House since Angela Lansbury suggested Laurence Harvey play

solitaire in *The Manchurian Candidate*. Frankie Muniz stars in this breezy dysfunctional-family sitcom as the eponymous genius learning to cope with his newly discovered colossal IQ while still being a pre-teen lad (hotfooting it from an explosion he's just caused, he tells us, "Okay, the difference between a stink bomb and a level-three toxic biohazard is apparently two extra drops of sulphur tetroxide. I'm totally suing that website").

The heart and soul of the show belongs, though, to Malcolm's parents, with Jane Kaczmarek stunning as volcanic uber-mom Lois and a pre-*Breaking Bad* Bryan Cranston as Hal, the dunderhead paterfamilias. They steal every scene and ground the zaniness with their confident playing of a long-married couple who, despite little money, dreadful extended families and several problem children, still have the hots for each other.

Discs: The original 4:3 broadcasts have been 'opened up' for syndication in widescreen, with often involuntarily ironic results, making it possible now to spot directors, equipment and assorted crew members who would normally have remained out of shot (Cranston manfully hosts a guide to these boo-boos). To see the shows in the original format one has to select the fairly raucous writer and actor commentaries that play over selected scenes. A retrospective documentary celebrates the show's first three years on air.

Books



'Easily defeated charm': many have detected insecurity and self-doubt beneath Dana Andrews's square-jawed good looks

THE MAN FROM DON'T, MISSISSIPPI

HOLLYWOOD ENIGMA: DANA ANDREWS

By Carl Rollyson, University Press of Mississippi, 352pp, £35.95, ISBN 9781604735673

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

A book shouldn't be blamed for its blurb. Even so, to find the flyleaf of Carl Rollyson's biography of Dana Andrews describing it as "the complete story of a great actor" sets up misgivings that are never wholly assuaged by anything in the book. Leaving aside "complete" for the moment, "great actor" is surely bidding very high – even if great has become a sadly devalued adjective. At his best – notably in a handful of good films in the 1940s – Andrews was an interesting, distinctive actor with a talent for subtle underplaying laced with intriguing hints of moral ambiguity; as David Thomson put it, he could "suggest unease, shiftiness and rancour barely concealed by good looks". But his career at the top was short. He came to films late – he was over 30 before he made his first screen appearance – and initial promise was curtailed by a decline

into alcoholism and uninspired B movies. At best, it could be argued there was potential for greatness and that he's become an unduly neglected figure. His name surely rings few bells these days and even those who recognise it might be in some doubt as to how to pronounce it: 'Dahna' or 'Dayna'? (It's the latter.)

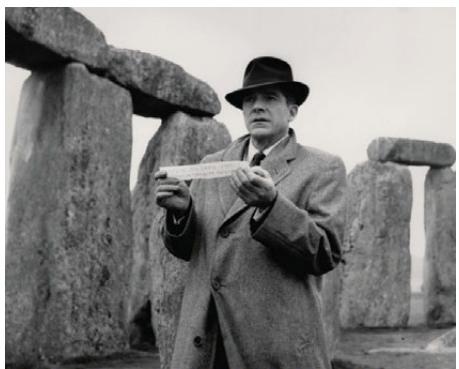
Two years ago, in his *Dana Andrews – The Face of Noir*, James McKay summed up his subject as "one of the most undervalued actors in film history". McKay's book was a film-by-film study with a brief biographical preface attached; Rollyson's is a full-on biography that, even at less than 300 pages of text, feels a little overstretched. We're well over a third in before we even get to Andrews's first movie.

The insecurity and self-doubt that plagued Andrews even at the height of his stardom may have stemmed, Rollyson suggests, from his childhood. He was born the third of nine

"If it weren't for [my wife],"
Andrews wrote, "I'd be like the
rest of the Hollywood gang:
shallow, money-mad maniacs"

children in the improbably named township of Don't, Mississippi, where his father was a Baptist minister, and brought up in Texas. Though he reacted against his father's faith and his politics – Charles Forrest Andrews at one point actively supported the Ku Klux Klan, although evidently more for religious than racist reasons – Andrews never ceased to share something of the older man's aversion to the profession his son had chosen. "Just when I'm beginning to be successful here," Dana wrote to his younger brother Charles in 1943 from Hollywood, "I begin to hate the place... If it weren't for Mary [his wife], who is wonderful, I'd be like the rest of the Hollywood gang: shallow, position-conscious, pleasure-seeking, money-mad maniacs... Sometimes I get so sick of this nasty place I could throw the whole thing up and move back to Texas."

This sense of revulsion at what he was doing translated all too easily into the nagging self-disgust that not only fuelled his drinking but might explain the hint of anxiety – of "easily defeated charm" – that many have detected beneath Andrews's square-jawed good looks – a quality that, paradoxically, is what makes him most interesting as an actor. Acting, in



Shifty: Andrews in 1957's 'Night of the Demon'

fact, wasn't what he most wanted to do. His primary ambition was to be an opera singer; he took lessons professionally and by all accounts had a fine voice. Stage acting, mainly at the Pasadena Playhouse, was supposed to be a stop-gap while he tried for a singing career; when Hollywood started to show an interest, Andrews never told the studios he could sing, chiefly to avoid getting stuck in inane musicals like *Up in Arms* (1944), where he played (non-singing) stooge to Danny Kaye.

Rollyson goes into detail, as you might expect, on the films that established Andrews's reputation – *The Ox-bow Incident* (1942), *Laura* (1944), *A Walk in the Sun* (1945) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) – analysing the qualities that make his best performances so effective: the reticence and the skill at conveying emotional undercurrents through minimal means. In *Best Years*, he notes the contrast between Andrews's quiet underplaying and Fredric March's grandstanding – though it was March who won the Oscar while Andrews wasn't even nominated. But Rollyson also finds reasons to praise some of Andrews's less-regarded films of the period, such as Otto Preminger's noir thriller *Fallen Angel* (1945) and the western *Canyon Passage* (1946), whose director, Jacques Tourneur, "captured the actor's romantic and yet reserved allure".

From the late 1940s onwards, the quality of Andrews's roles declined and his drinking grew worse; which was cause and which effect is unclear. But the wounded quality now detectable in his screen persona was put to good use as the brutal cop in *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950) and in Fritz Lang's last two American films, *While the City Sleeps* and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (both 1956), where the shiftiness in Andrews's gaze perfectly fitted the equivocal world of Lang's bleak vision.

So, a "complete" biography? In some respects, yes: Rollyson allows a lot of space, perhaps too much, to Andrews's relationship with the hometown fiancée he threw over when he moved to California. But the book skates nervously over his stance through the witch-hunt years: a left-liberal and board member of the Screen Actors Guild, Andrews readily joined the 'Hollywood Fights Back' campaign against HUAC in the early days, but thereafter seems to have kept his head down. One can hardly blame him, but it would have been good to know for certain. And, in a scene located at Chasen's restaurant in Los Angeles three pages before the book's end, we're suddenly told: "It was there that Orson Welles punched Dana and later wrote an apologetic note." What, you can't help wondering, was that all about? ☀

CACHÉ (HIDDEN)

By Catherine Wheatley, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 96pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781844573493

Reviewed by Thomas Elsaesser

It's hard to think of a recent film whose path from 'arthouse movie' to 'film classic' has been as short as that of Michael Haneke's *Hidden* (*Caché*). Since it was released on DVD in 2006, it has prompted more scholarly articles, symposia and conference papers than any recent film I can remember. And indeed, it does have something for everyone when put on the curriculum: gender studies and multiculturalism, memory studies and trauma, post-colonialism and the moral rot of the (French) bourgeoisie.

Before *Hidden*, Haneke was considered a director who, though evidently very canny, either made one queasy and uncomfortable (think *Benny's Video*) or deeply depressed and upset (think *Funny Games*, either version). There seemed to be so much anger, misanthropy and sadism that one had to be well versed in the Austrian penchant for (self-)flagellation to also recognise the humour and appreciate the theatricality. Even some of the earlier movies Haneke made in France (*The Piano Teacher*, *Time of the Wolf*) required a strong stomach – and so does *Hidden*. But here, all the previous upsets and irritants in this unquestionably impressive directorial career fell into place; it even made Haneke's other films retroactively understandable as first drafts for an encompassing vision of contemporary life that was bleak but also deeply humane. The blend of Bergman and Buñuel inaugurated with *Code Unknown* and sustained with *Hidden*, *The White Ribbon* and *Amour* carries the moral weight of Europe's (and Haneke's own) divided legacy of Catholic and Protestant ethics, from each of which the director distils a fundamentalist side – and not always as a criticism.

A good number if not all of these points are deftly touched upon in Catherine Wheatley's BFI Film Classics volume. She calls *Hidden* "a filmic Rorschach blot, the patterns each viewer determines revealing more about his or her own concerns, interests, fears and desires than they may do about Haneke's". A recognised and well-regarded Haneke expert, Wheatley dissects some of *Hidden*'s major talking points, such as the closing sequence (with which she starts) and the first shot, by now probably the most written-about opening since Orson Welles's three-and-a-half-minute continuous tracking shot in *Touch of Evil*.



Juliette Binoche and Daniel Auteuil in 'Caché'

Wheatley is also well versed in the academic debate and sensibly summarises the various positions. However, she concentrates on the UK reception in the quality press and fashions from the critics' views her individual chapters. These consider the film in the contexts of the thriller genre, bourgeois guilt, racism and recent French history, and as "a compendium of strong ideas... about the cinema itself". But she is also torn between layering these different approaches without "privileging one theme... over others" and nonetheless guiding the reader through the film so as to "better understand its secrets".

This she does admirably by a twofold strategy. Her study is first of all a model in close reading, helped by judiciously chosen colour reproductions and by paying detailed attention to nuances of speech and dialogue, shot composition and elliptical editing as well as paying careful attention to the soundtrack. At every point, she also asks the questions – about causality, motivation, action-reaction and plot gaps – that baffle the spectator as this enigmatic tale of spying, blackmail, revenge, guilt and retribution unfolds. Wheatley's other strategy is to bring to bear on *Hidden* her formidable knowledge of Haneke's body of work, interweaving her analysis with cross-references to scenes and motifs from his other films, while sparingly using the director's own commentary from interviews.

The most scholarly section is the chapter on screens and spectators, which places Haneke's often self-contradictory views on cinema versus television in the wider context of how we might understand the future of film in the digital age. Even European *auteurs* now take account of viewers' increasing sophistication about how to read images: not as indices of truth, proof or evidence but as ways of orienting themselves in space and time, in memory and the present. *Hidden* in this respect is more sophisticated than its director's own pronouncements: with its ability to disorient us on so many counts, it thoroughly deserves its status as a film that marks a paradigm change. It takes us – in one gripping narrative – from the cinema as a historic extension of the basically voyeuristic stance, inherited from the one-point linear perspective dating from the Renaissance, to a cinema that no longer presumes to tell us what is inside and what outside, what is seeing and what being seen, because it knows itself to be caught up in the very surveillance society it tries to contest.

Many a viewer of *Hidden* might pick up this book in the hope of finding the definitive answer to the enigma Haneke so teasingly leaves us with: who sent the tapes? Wheatley holds off on giving in to this demand, without neglecting its existence. After going through all the possibilities (arguing that Haneke's studied ambiguity gives just enough evidence for each and every one, including the one that it is the director himself who "sends" the tapes, by way of turning the film into a thought experiment), she concludes by saying, presumably with tongue in cheek, that *Hidden* is "a film that demands repeat viewings". The irony is that she has managed to mimic in her slim volume the overall structure of the film: insofar as her book starts with the end of the film, she reminds us that *Hidden*, too, is conceived like a Moebius strip: when you think you've come to the end, you're actually just starting at the beginning. ☀

SHADOW ECONOMIES OF CINEMA

Mapping Informal Film Distribution

By Ramon Lobato, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 176pp, £16.95, ISBN 9781844574117

Reviewed by Nick Roddick

When Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* opened earlier this month, it kicked off with a two-week run in the West End. That's the way they used to open big films: an exclusive first run in a big metropolitan movie theatre, then key cities, followed by suburban and rural, right down (when they came along) to video, DVD, pay-TV and free TV. The different stages are called windows.

That was then. First the internet opened the door a little, then broadband kicked it in. Now, big films generally open day-and-date around the world, but even then are often available on bootleg DVD or pirate download well before their official release.

Parallel distribution channels operate alongside the studios' window system for everything from faith-based evangelical movies to porn

Melbourne-based Ramon Lobato is the latest to look at what one might call the defenestration of cinema and he comes up with some challenging points, noting that parallel channels – or “shadow economies”, as he calls them – of distribution both pre-dated the studios' window system and continue to operate alongside it, for everything from faith-based evangelical movies to porn. Lobato also gives short shrift to the libertarian view that all this has somehow ‘democratised’ film distribution, pointing out that a deregulated market and democracy are not the same thing.

The book's frame is too wide, from middle America to Nigeria to Mexico City, for me to summarise all its arguments here. But the basic point emerges clearly: we have moved from a fairly simple top-down system where films were fed down a heavily controlled pipeline, to a messy and complicated bottom-up one where easy access to everything is the driving force.

Lobato writes well and clearly, slipping in just enough academic language to satisfy his peer group but not so much as to alienate the ordinary reader with an interest in the film business. The book's best bit comes in a footnote in which Lobato describes watching a World War II documentary downloaded from Rutube and finding the grim wartime footage disconcertingly interrupted by exhortations to buy Russian mobile phones and laundry liquids, historical nightmare regularly welded to an alien ad-speak paradise.

It is this constant presence of ‘noise’ that characterises cinema's shadow economies – and may end up conditioning our future consumption of moving-image culture at least as much as the formal and informal networks this book eloquently describes. A night at the pictures is going to mean just that. **S**

AMERICAN SHOWMAN:

Samuel ‘Roxy’ Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry

By Ross Melnick, Columbia University Press, 576pp, £26, ISBN 9780231159043

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

With so many greatly exaggerated reports of the death of cinema abroad, what a pleasure to read Ross Melnick's scrupulously researched, exhaustive biography of movie-palace impresario Samuel ‘Roxy’ Rothafel – a biography that doubles as a cultural history, looking to a moment when the movies were the upstarts, making vaudeville and live theatre quake in their boots.

Samuel ‘Roxy’ Rothafel, born Rothafel in 1882, was the son of German Jewish immigrants, raised between Stillwater, Minnesota and Brooklyn, New York. In 1908, Rothafel opened the Family Theatre in Forest City, Pennsylvania, his first such endeavour, after a peripatetic career including three and a half years in the US Marine Corps, leaving him with a mania for drilling military discipline into his ushers and a passion for patriotic jingo given full vent during the propagandist years of World War I.

That collusion of government and showbiz is discussed at length in one of Melnick's most enlightening chapters, ‘The Movie House as Recruiting Center’. By the time the United States had flung itself full-bodied into the Great War, S.L. Rothafel, less than a decade removed from his humble beginnings at the Family, was managing the programming, lighting, stagecraft – even the scoring and guest-conducting – at Manhattan's two largest theaters, the Rialto and the Rivoli.

Later dubbed “the man who gave the movies a college education”, Rothafel built his startling success in part on appeals to the striving cultural pretensions of the middlebrow audience whom he aspired to lure into the heretofore stubbornly disreputable movie houses. In addition to Rothafel's amusing early digression into “daylight pictures” – allowing projection in a well-lit and thus less scandal-encouraging theatre – this better class of patron was courted through booking of religious, educational or literary properties, for which Rothafel designed a properly “artistic” multimedia setting. One influential example of his sense-overwhelming, symbiotic showmanship was the 1914 presentation of the pious epic *Quo Vadis?* including a live prologue from the upper boxes, an orchestra “garlanded in flowers” and burning incense. “Take the picture by itself and it comes to us a little bare,” ran one review of an early Rothafel presentation. “Surround it by pretty furnishings, beautiful decorations, and fine music, and the picture is raised to the same high plain as its surroundings.”

Petitioning for a consideration of the

To Raoul Walsh's ‘What Price Glory’, Rothafel added a real-life Marine colour guard, fusillades and flash bombs



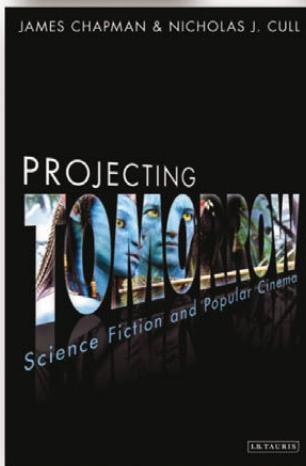
Exhibitor as author: ‘Roxy’ Rothafel

exhibitor as author, Melnick's project is to restore the silents to the context in which they were actually seen, like the archaeologist whose ultraviolet light restores the original loud pigmentation to the austere white marble of Greek and Roman statuary. Though the contemporary cinephile holds the ‘originally intended version’ sacred, Melnick reminds us that the feature was often but one element in a variety programme including ever-swelling orchestras, choruses, ballet troupes and *tableaux vivants* – all of which Rothafel would organise thematically to complement the picture at hand. For Allan Dwan's *Soldiers of Fortune* (1919), Rothafel interpolated live on-stage dancers and a “flood of color” to introduce a change of scenery to South America. To Raoul Walsh's 1926 *What Price Glory*, he added a Marine colour guard, fusillades and flash bombs, and frequent musical director Erno Rapee's hit song ‘Charmaine’, with sheet music on sale in the lobby. Frank Borzage's 1928 *Street Angel*, set in Italy, benefited from a “Carnival de Venice” with a cast of 350. Comparatively, the bombast of the interactive ‘4D’ experience being sold today is a tin whistle.

In addition to Rothafel's undeniable glitz chutzpah, Melnick makes the case for his subject as a progressive tastemaker, having introduced American audiences to Ernst Lubitsch with *Madame Du Barry* (which he retitled and re-edited as *Passion*), and to a sampler platter of European modernism with his 1921 presentation of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (fitted with a jagged score of contemporary composers then unknown in the US). In 1922 he riskily premiered Robert Flaherty's documentary feature *Nanook of the North* at his 5,300-seat Capitol Theatre. The same year, he took yet another risk at the Capitol that made ‘Roxy’ a household word, broadcasting a regular radio variety show from the premises, earning the theatre's featured performers national fame as ‘Roxy's Gang’.

Melnick's book offers a well-documented picture of Roxy the plate-spinning workaholic; Roxy the spectacular impresario, improvising cross-promotional synergy in the rapidly integrating entertainment industry of the 1920s; and Roxy the folksy man behind the microphone. Perhaps necessarily absent in all of this, as he left no private papers behind, is the solitary Rothafel. In fact, by likening Roxy – the ultimate integrationist Jew – to the chameleonic Jazz-era celebrity in Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1983), Melnick suggests that well before his death in 1936, Rothafel the man had disappeared within Roxy the phenomenon. **S**

Read



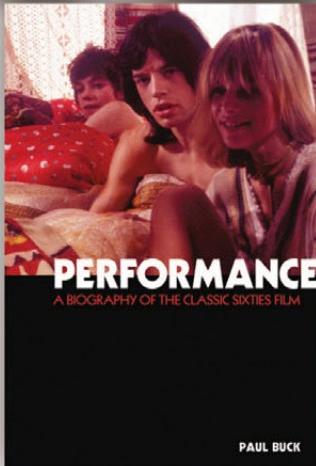
PROJECTING TOMORROW

Science Fiction and Popular Cinema

By James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781780764108

This new exploration of the science-fiction genre examines landmark science-fiction films from the 1930s to the present. They include genre classics such as *Things to Come*, *Forbidden Planet* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* alongside modern blockbusters *Star Wars* and *Avatar*. Chapman and Cull consider both screen originals and adaptations of the work of major science-fiction authors. Informed throughout by extensive research in US and British archives, the book documents the production histories of each film to show how they made their way to the screen – and why they turned out the way they did.

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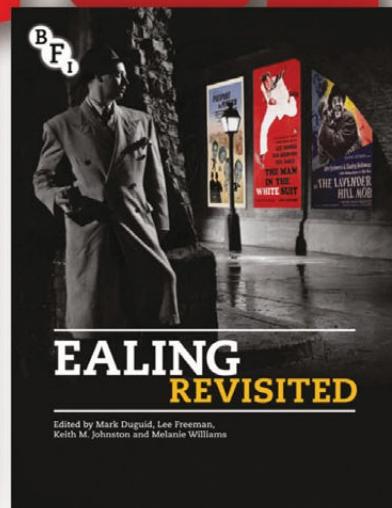
PERFORMANCE

A Biography of the Classic Sixties Film

By Paul Buck, Omnibus Press, 320pp, illustrated, £19.95, ISBN 9781780387002

Performance is a cult 1968 film that inhabits a disturbing world of sex, violence, reality, fantasy and unexpected role reversals. Beset by controversy, it brought together London's violent gangster subculture and the hedonistic world of 1960s rock stardom, but Warner Bros were appalled by the perverted result. With the film ordered to be recut, and almost destroyed altogether, the scene was set for endless myths surrounding the production, the imposing personality of Donald Cammell, the role of co-director Nicolas Roeg and the charged sparks between Mick Jagger, James Fox and Anita Pallenberg during the shoot. This book is a detailed account of the film, researched by Paul Buck for over 40 years and drawing on a dizzying array of diverse sources.

www.omnibuspress.com

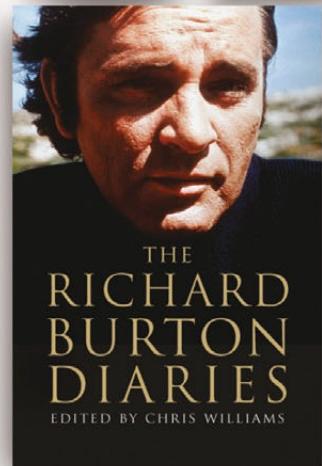


EALING REVISITED

Edited by Mark Duguid, Lee Freeman, Keith M. Johnston and Melanie Williams

Published to coincide with the BFI's major retrospective, *Ealing Revisited* offers a fresh perspective on the films and history of this much loved film studio, best known as the producer of classic film comedies such as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) and *The Ladykillers* (1955). Bringing together leading experts on Ealing and British cinema, this beautifully illustrated book explores the history of Ealing Studios, presents a closer look at its films and their unsung creators, and considers Ealing's lasting impact on British cinema and society.

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THE RICHARD BURTON DIARIES

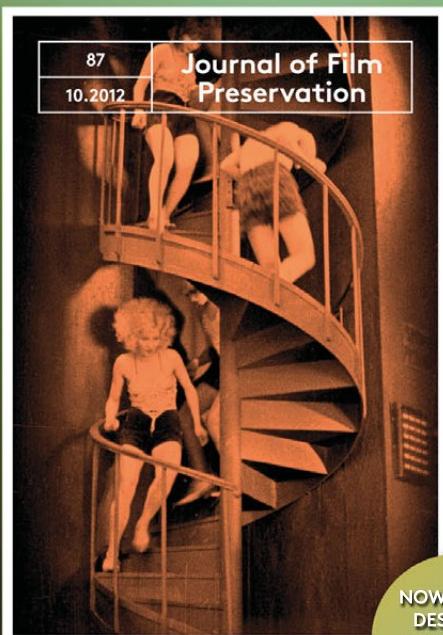
Edited by Chris Williams, Yale University Press, 704pp, illustrated, hardback, £25, ISBN 9780300180107

The irresistible, candid diaries of Richard Burton, published in full for the first time, encompass the actor's entire career and celebrated marriages to Elizabeth Taylor. While publicly rubbing shoulders with shining lights – including Olivia de Havilland, John Gielgud, Claire Bloom, Laurence Olivier, John Huston, Dylan Thomas and Edward Albee – Burton also played the real-life roles of family man, father, husband and razor-sharp observer. His diaries offer a rare and fresh perspective on his life and career, as well as on the glamorous decades of the mid-20th century.

"Likely to prove the literary sensation of the year." Christopher Wilson, *The Daily Telegraph*.

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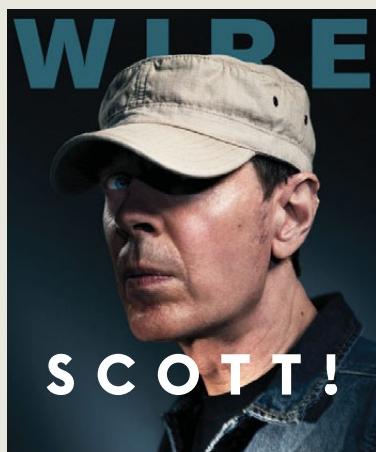
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SANSHO DAYU



Mizoguchi's 1954 *Sansho Dayu* is set in feudal Japan, but the family reunion at its climax carries echoes of more recent traumas

By Alexander Jacoby

"Of all the great endings in Mizoguchi's cinema," writes Mark Le Fanu, "the ending of *Sansho the Bailiff* is surely the greatest, the most cathartic." In the last scene of the 1954 film (currently available on DVD under its original Japanese title *Sansho Dayu*), the protagonist Zushio (Hanayaki Yoshiaki) is reunited with his mother Tamaki (Tanaka Kinuyo), from whom he was parted early in the film. His father, a provincial governor who displeased the authorities and was sent into exile, is now dead; his sister, sold into slavery alongside Zushio, has sacrificed herself to help him escape. His mother, who was sold into prostitution, is old, blind and crippled. After separation and suffering, their reunion has an emotional power that is unsurpassed in world cinema.

The scene takes place on the shores of remote Sado Island in the Sea of Japan, long a place of exile. In the last shot, the camera pans and cranes away from the embrace of mother and son, coming to rest on the lonely sea and its seemingly uninhabited islets, the only sign of life a man gathering seaweed in the middle distance. A climax of matchless intensity resolves itself into quiet contemplation.

As in so many other films (*The 400 Blows*, *Pierrot le fou* – or, in Japan, Kitano Takeshi's *Hana-bi*), the sea represents journey's end. In an island nation especially, it seems fitting for a story to end at this geographical boundary. The sea in Japan carries the threat of death: Zushio has been told, wrongly, that his mother died in a recent tsunami. It is impossible today to watch the scene without thinking of the tsunami that struck another coast of Japan in March 2011. The threat of natural disaster is ever present in this earthquake-prone, volcanic archipelago.

But the film's central subject is man-made disaster. In 1954, when Japanese prisoners of war were still being repatriated from the Soviet Union, the reunion would have had a painful topicality – just as, only nine years after the end of World War II, the scenes in the labour camp where Zushio and his sister are enslaved would inevitably have brought to mind very recent atrocities, committed by Japan and others. And the reunion is not the film's only climax. It's preceded by a sequence in which Zushio, appointed to the post of governor by a sympathetic minister, frees the slaves – only to resign his post, knowing that he has exceeded his authority, and journey to Sado in search of his mother.

After separation and suffering, the reunion of mother and son has an emotional power that is unsurpassed in world cinema

The political climax comes before the personal one. But this does not mean that the film gives it less weight, since the freeing of the slaves – an act of mercy, in accordance with the teachings of Zushio's father – is the moral precondition of the reunion. The point is made eloquently by the fact that it is the statuette of the Buddhist goddess of mercy, inherited from the father, that allows Tamaki to recognise her son. As she says (in lines delivered with flawless conviction by Tanaka, giving perhaps her greatest performance): "I only know that you have followed your father's teachings. That is why we are able to meet again now."

"The overall effect of the last scene," writes Robin Wood, "is to balance the sense of loss and tragic waste with an affirmation of spiritual unity... In the world of conflicts, cruelty and violent disorder that Mizoguchi so vividly creates for contemplation, the survival of humane, *human* feeling ('Without compassion, man is but a beast' – one of the father's precepts), defined in terms of a complex and living relatedness to family and tradition, is itself a triumph to be celebrated."

It is a triumph, but not a sentimental one. The sense of loss is inescapable: the deaths of father and daughter, and the sufferings of mother and son, preclude us from reading it as "a happy ending".

But it is nevertheless, an affirmative one – and the fitting conclusion to a film that, despite its period setting, ranks among the most compassionate aesthetic responses to the darkest events of the modern age. **S**



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